

BREAKING
THE
HINDENBURG LINE

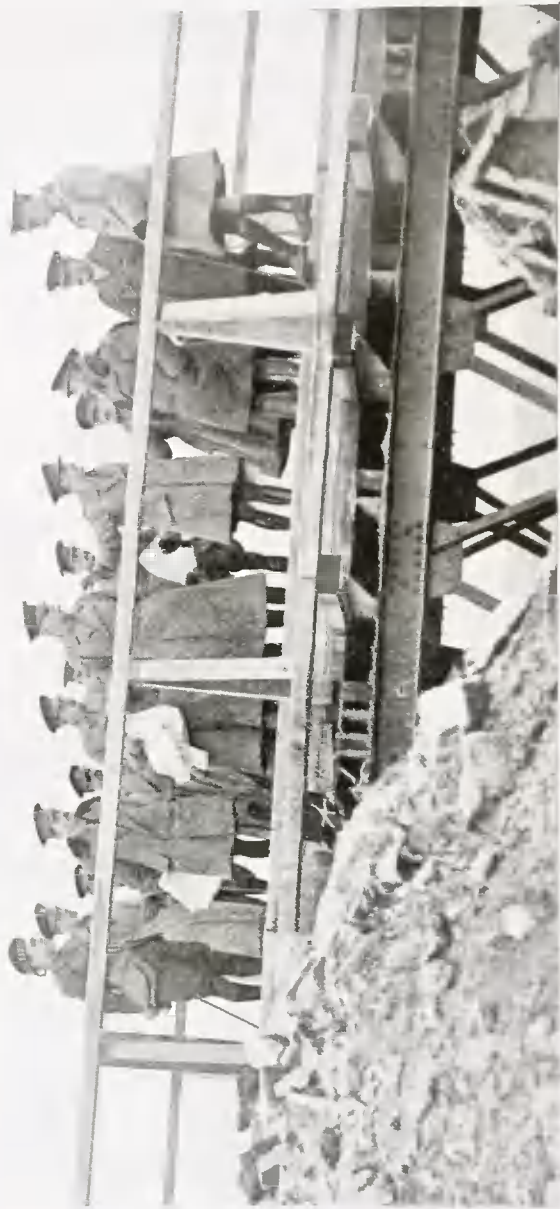
RAYMOND E. PRESTON, M.A.

THE GABLES,
BILTON.

BREAKING THE HINDENBURG LINE

THE STORY OF THE

46TH (NORTH MIDLAND) DIVISION



HIS MAJESTY KING GEORGE V INSPECTING THE BATTLEFIELD OF BELLEFLEUR

Frontispiece

BREAKING THE HINDENBURG LINE

THE STORY OF THE
46TH (NORTH MIDLAND) DIVISION

BY
MAJOR R. E. PRIESTLEY, M.C., R.E.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
MAJOR-GENERAL G. F. BOYD, C.B.,
C.M.G., D.S.O., D.C.M.

WITH TWO MAPS AND SEVENTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS

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TO
OUR COMRADES WHO HAVE FALLEN IN
THE GREAT ADVENTURE
MAY WE PROVE WORTHY OF THEM
IN THE DAYS TO COME

FOREWORD

MAJOR PRIESTLEY'S book is not intended as an official record; nevertheless it affords a graphic and accurate account of what took place on a small but decisive sector of the Western front during the "Battles of the Hundred Days."

It was my good fortune to take over command of the North Midland Division at a critical moment of its career, and just before we marched south to join General Sir H. Rawlinson's Fourth Army. To my predecessor, Major-General W. Thwaites, must be ascribed the credit of having organized and trained the Division into a fighting machine in which every officer and man was imbued with a real soldier's spirit.

It is to this fixed determination to win through at all costs, regardless of incidents on flank and in rear, that I mainly attribute the successes won by the Division.

We joined the IX Corps, commanded by Lieut.-Gen. Sir Walter Braithwaite, and consisting of three distinguished fighting units, but the 46th were determined to make a name for themselves second to none.

No man can say that they failed.

GERALD F. BOYD,
Major-General.

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(29th September, 1918)

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BREAKING THE HINDENBURG LINE

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

OUTLINE OF THE PREVIOUS HISTORY OF THE 46TH (NORTH MIDLAND) DIVISION IN THE WAR

IN writing this introductory chapter it should at once be stated that it is not in any way intended to be a history of the Division since its arrival in France, nor does it attempt to do justice to the bravery and tenacity exhibited at all times during the years it was on the Western front. It is just an attempt to outline its doings and movements from the time of its mobilization until, in September 1918, it joined the Fourth Army

The 46th Division, which was responsible for what was described in the Press as the "Miracle of the War," and whose exploits during the "Hundred Days" are described in the following chapters, is one of the pre-war Territorial Divisions.

In days of peace it was known as the North Midland Division, and was composed of men from the counties of Derby, Nottingham, Lincoln, Leicester, and Stafford. It was then commanded by Major-General the Hon. E. J. Montagu-Stuart-Wortley, C.B., C.M.G., M.V.O., D.S.O.

On the outbreak of war the Division mobilized, its

headquarters being first at Derby, and afterwards at Luton and Bishop's Stortford. After less than seven months' training in England it was ordered to France in February 1915, enjoying the distinction of being the first complete Territorial Division to arrive in any theatre of war.

In less than two weeks after its arrival the Division was placed in reserve for the Battle of Neuve-Chapelle, 12th-13th March, 1915, but was not used. It received its baptism of fire at Ploegsteert, and later took over the line in front of Kemmel and Neuve-Eglise, whence its next move was to the Ypres salient. Here it settled down for nearly four months, part of which was spent in front of the notorious Hill 60.

Whilst in this area the first "Flammenwerfer" attack made by the enemy was launched on the Division on its left, which, stunned by the unexpectedness of the new weapon, recoiled, leaving the left flank of the 46th Division in the air. What might have been a serious disaster was averted by the stubborn fighting of the 139th Brigade.

The Division was next moved to the Bethune area, and on the 13th October, 1915, it relieved the Guards Division and made an attack on "The Quarries" and "Fosse 8." This was the first big attack the 46th Division had been called upon to perform. The casualties were very high, reducing its strength by nearly one-half.

In December 1915 the Division was selected to proceed to Egypt, and two Brigades actually arrived there. The orders were then countermanded, however, the Brigades were recalled, and the whole Division returned to the North of France in February 1916. Here they took over the line before the famous Vimy Ridge, which was at that time in the hands of the enemy. The unit relieved was



CAPTAIN J. C. GREEN, V.C., R.A.M.C. (T.)

EARLY V.C. HEROES OF THE 46TH DIVISION

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CAPTAIN C. G. VICKERS, V.C.

EARLY V.C. HEROES OF THE 46TH DIVISION

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a famous French Division, and this was the first time British troops had held this particular sector of the line.

The next big effort demanded of the 46th Division was the attack on Gommecourt, a village which was the apex of the most westerly portion of the enemy line at that time. The attack, which was carried out on the 1st July, 1916, was the extreme left of the great Somme offensive, and had been foreseen by the enemy and was not successful. Very heavy casualties were again sustained, and no gain of ground was made. It is pleasant to record in parenthesis that in 1917 it was the privilege of the 46th Division to chase the Germans out of the village where so many of their comrades had fought their last fight only a few months before.

Whilst following up the retiring army in this area, there was on March 13th, 1917, some sharp fighting, as he took up a position in a strongly-wired trench known as Rettemoy Graben. This position, after being bombarded for a day, was attacked by the 5th North Staffords and 5th South Staffords; the 7th Division attacking on their right, with Bucquoy as their objective.

The attack was made at 11 p.m. on a very dark night, but owing to the wire only being partially cut (due to the limited time at the disposal of the Artillery), and the enemy fighting a very stubborn rearguard action, the attack was unsuccessful, and the two battalions mentioned suffered heavy casualties.

In March 1917 the Division relieved the 24th Division in front of Lens in the Lievin sector, and it remained there for four months. During this time much hard fighting took place, which culminated in the operations of July 1st, 1917. From the time the sector was taken over the line was advanced an average of 2,000 yards, and the ground captured included Cité St. Edward, Cité

St. Theodore, Cité Jeanne d'Arc, Cité de Riaumont, the Bois de Lievin, the Bois de Riaumont, and the important tactical point Hill 65.

For the next fourteen months the Division was engaged in trench warfare in various parts of the Cambrai-Lens front, during which time the Canadian Corps on its immediate right, assisted by the 46th Divisional Artillery, made their successful attack on Hill 70. During this action the Infantry of the Division broke up at least one of the enemy's counter-attacks by enfilade fire, causing many casualties. From this neighbourhood the next move was to the Givenchy area, where a line was taken over between the Lawe Canal and Givenchy, including the famous Route "A" Keep, which had a few weeks earlier been so gallantly defended by the 55th Division when they stemmed the German offensive in this part of the line.

During this long spell of trench warfare, "raiding" became the order of the day. Major-General W. Thwaites, C.B., who had assumed command shortly after the Battle of Gommecourt, was a keen disciplinarian and a popular leader. He encouraged, and indeed insisted upon, "raiding" to the utmost, as being the type of warfare best calculated to improve the offensive spirit of the men. Many very clever coups were effected during the next fifteen months. Numerous prisoners were captured in these raids, which materially assisted the process of wearing down the enemy *moral*. This system of training improved the fighting condition and capacity of the Division to such an extent that former reverses were forgotten, or remembered only in the determination to wipe them out by achieving decisive success in the future. The 46th Division arrived at the scene of the actions described in the following chapters as hard as nails and fit for anything.

General Thwaites handed over to his successor, Major-General G. F. Boyd, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., D.C.M., a fighting force which proved itself thoroughly efficient, and whose deeds in the last and most decisive months of the Great War will live in history.

During the operations outlined in this chapter the 46th Division had served in the First, Second, Third, and Fifth Armies, and in the I, II, III, V, VII, XI, XIII, XIV, XVII, and XVIII Corps. Though called on to defend some of the most important parts of the Western front, not one inch of ground was ever lost.

The severity of the fighting in which the Division has been engaged during the War is best seen from an examination of its casualty list. The total losses between February 1915 and November 11th, 1918, were:

	Officers.	Other Ranks.
Killed . . .	275	3,475
Wounded . . .	1,104	21,285
Missing . . .	123	3,307
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Total . . .	1,502	28,067

Such figures do indeed speak for themselves.

PART I

THE BATTLE OF BELLENGLISE

(29th September, 1918)

CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARY OPERATIONS AND PREPARATIONS
FOR THE ATTACK

"At an hour and date to be notified later, the 46th Division, as part of a major operation, will cross the St. Quentin Canal, capture the Hindenburg Line, and advance to a position shown on the attached Map A."

Such was the opening paragraph of the preliminary order issued by the General Staff on the 25th September, notifying all concerned of the general scope of the operation which was fated to bring fame to the Division. At this period of the war the eyes of the whole of Europe were focussed in the main on one thing and one thing only. Would the Hindenburg Line suffice, as the Germans hoped and believed, to hold up the (up to that time) irresistible tide of conquest sweeping back slowly but steadily across France; or would that last bulwark of German Imperialism be broken asunder like lesser obstacles, and trampled underfoot by the victorious Armies of the Allies? The answer to that question was to be given on the 29th September, and in the solving of the

problem the 46th Division was destined to play a glorious and decisive part.

The General Staff, who, under instructions from the IX Corps, had planned the attack, and who had better means of estimating such doubtful features as the moral of the forces opposed to us and the general disposition of the enemy's forces, may have been confident of success. Many, however, who could only judge from direct observation of the enemy's positions, or from aeroplane photographs, were of opinion that the Division had been given an impossible task.

At the best it seemed likely that the efforts and sacrifices of the 46th Division might pin down the enemy on the Bellenglise front, and attract his reserves, whilst the Americans and Australians broke through on the left, where they were faced with no natural obstacle.

If this northern attack succeeded, the resultant pressure on the enemy's front to the north might then save the situation on the Bellenglise front, and enable the 46th Division to get forward at a later period.

The sequel was to show which of these opinions was justified, and incidentally to admit for ever the claim of the 46th Division to be classed with what the Germans would call "Sturmtruppen."

On the 12th September, 1918, after fifteen months of almost continuous defensive warfare, the Division moved from the Bethune area to the neighbourhood of Beaucourt sur l'Hallue and passed into G.H.Q. reserve for a few days' rest and training before proceeding into action near the southern limit of the British front.

On the 21st September, after one or two days in the Tertry area, where the Division was still in reserve while the various Commanders were reconnoitring their future area and the various preparations for the hand-over were

made, the relief of part of the 1st and 4th Australian Divisions by the 46th Division was carried out, and all ranks settled down to learn the new area in which they were to fight.

The new front line consisted of some 2,500 to 3,000 yards length of an old German trench system to the west of the St. Quentin Canal which had been captured from the Germans by our predecessors and reorganized by them to suit defence in the opposite direction. It formed a splendid defensive position and a very fair jumping-off ground for any future projected operations against the Canal and the immensely strong Hindenburg Line to the east of it.

At the time the North Midland Division took over the line the enemy still held a strong system of trenches, with outposts in advance of them, on the west bank of the Canal, which he held in considerable strength and which prevented any near reconnaissance of the banks and of the approaches to the Canal. This was, however, in a measure counteracted by the fact that along the greater part of our front our troops were on high ground overlooking the German defences. The country to the east of the Canal was spread out before their eyes like a map, only the valleys being concealed from view by the ridges between them and our line.

From vantage positions on our front line almost the whole extent of the Canal opposite to us could be seen, and the villages of Nauroy and Levergies, the latter of which was to become intimately known to the Division in the future fighting, were plainly visible. Into Bellen-glise itself, immediately below our trenches, it appeared possible to throw a cricket-ball, and every movement of the Germans in the neighbourhood of the Canal and the village was plainly to be seen.

Behind our line the country was of a very open nature,

consisting of broad rolling downs intersected by long and broad, rather shallow valleys, with very few outstanding points or features. Such isolated features of the landscape as did strike the eye were a few partially destroyed woods and copses, sunken roads, and an occasional artificial strong point of German origin, the latter plainly marked out from the surrounding country by the white scars left by the chalky soil thrown out from dug-outs and trenches. All round such points, which had naturally been favourite targets for our own and—after they had passed into our hands—for the German artillery, the ground was pock-marked by shell-holes. Their neighbourhood was distinctly unhealthy except for the inhabitants of the dug-outs, saps, and trenches, which were the only shelters available in the vicinity. Perhaps the favourite target for the enemy's guns and the most prominent feature of all was the small conical-shaped hill known as the "Tumulus," which stood near the fork of the Vadencourt-Bellenglise and the Vadencourt-Berthaucourt Roads. This little mound was a usual registration point for the enemy Artillery, and had been struck again and again until it stood out as a stark white landmark stripped of all its original greenery by the impact and blasting action of the shells. Here, especially, was a spot near which it was dangerous to linger—transport made their way by the hill at the trot, and no one whose business took him in the neighbourhood of the hill let the grass grow under his feet.

Certain of the strong points, such as those at Collin's Quarry and Hudson's Post, subsequently became important nodal points in the divisional system of communications, while the shelter afforded by the groups of dug-outs, in country where otherwise shelter was not, caused them to be chosen as sites for the headquarters of Brigades and

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Artillery Groups during the forming up on the night previous to the attack.

As usual in the case of an attack on prepared positions of considerable strength, which involved the concentration of a large force of artillery and other units not normally associated with a Division in the line, one of the chief problems to be overcome was the question of transportation to and from the line. In overcoming this difficulty the weather, which remained in the main dry and fine both immediately before and during the battle, was very helpful. In the sector of the attack the only main approaches to the front line were the two metalled roads which ran respectively through Le Verguier and through Vadencourt; the latter, which forked into two roads just west of the Tumulus, being the main divisional line of approach. These in themselves were not nearly sufficient to cope with the forward traffic, but the country between them was seamed with "dry-weather tracks," which were passable for horse traffic under the weather conditions then prevailing, while, in addition, the open nature of the country made it unnecessary to keep to tracks at all in dry weather.

Preparation for an attack of any magnitude was much hampered by the sharp bend back of the line upon our right flank. A glance at the map showing the tactical situation on the 23rd September betrays at once this backward bend of the British line on the right of the front held on that date by the Division. The enemy held Pontruet in force, and even had strong posts well up in and about the group of farm buildings known as St. Helène and situated on the Vadencourt-Bellenglise Road. On the 24th September a minor operation was undertaken by the 1st and 6th Divisions on our right, having in view the capture of certain high ground in front

of their line to the south of Pontruet. As a part of this operation the 46th Division was allotted the task of capturing Pontruet and the medley of trenches and strong-points which were based on this village.

The main attack was to be carried out by troops detailed from the 138th Infantry Brigade, two companies of which were ordered to advance from the forming-up line along the Vadencourt-Bellenglise Road from St. Hélène eastward for 500 yards; their object being to outflank the village of Pontruet and establish strong-posts due east of it. The advance was to be covered by a creeping barrage fired by the five Brigades of Artillery covering the front of the Division.

Meanwhile, two other companies of the same battalion were detailed to clear Pontruet itself, and the 139th Infantry Brigade were ordered to provide a mopping-up party to deal with certain trenches south-west of the village. The Artillery, in addition to the creeping barrage covering the assault, were to concentrate on Pontruet village and strong points in its immediate neighbourhood during the early part of the assault. It was thus hoped to pin the enemy to his positions until the outflanking party had succeeded in reaching their objective, when he would be compelled to retreat under enfilade fire from these companies. Tactically, the attack, although on a small scale, was very prettily conceived; and it was hoped that the whole of the garrison of Pontruet and the trenches round it, which were known to be held in force by the enemy, would be either captured or killed.

All preparations having been completed, zero was fixed for 5 a.m. on the 24th. At that hour the barrage opened and the two companies of the 5th Leicesters, to whom was allotted the task of outflanking the village, advanced to the attack. At the same time the 5th Sherwood Foresters made an assault on Beux and Leduc

Trenches, and, easily over-running these works and capturing or killing the garrison of the trenches, endeavoured to enter the village from the south-east.

Almost at the outset of the attack two Stokes mortars, which had been detailed to assist in the attack from north of the village, were knocked out by enemy artillery fire, and this hampered the attack from that side materially. For some time the attack sped fairly well, and good progress was made by our men, who penetrated into the northern elements of Pontruet and captured the strongly defended cemetery and the blockhouse. Their success was short-lived, however, for the enemy, reacting strongly with fresh reinforcements, bombed their way back down the Forgan's Trench—an enemy work running south-east and north-west right up the area attacked—and drove our men back almost to the forming-up line, forcing us to give up our hold on the part of Pontruet which remained in our hands. Hard fighting continued for several hours, but, according to statements of prisoners captured from the garrison, the enemy had been expecting an attack on Pontruet and was able to bring up strong reserves. A second attack in the evening by the 5th Leicesters, reinforced by a company of the 5th Sherwood Foresters, was repulsed, without our obtaining a footing in the village. At 1.40 a.m. on the 25th, the order was therefore given to withdraw from Pontruet, but to hold on to the captured posts to the north and west of the village.

The attack was thus in a great measure a tactical failure, though it left our positions somewhat improved. It had resulted, however, in the capture of one officer and one hundred and thirty-six other ranks, and had given the enemy a foretaste of the fighting quality of the Division. The *moral* of the men throughout was excellent: they fought with great dash and initiative, and



LIEUTENANT J. C. BARRETT, V.C., 1/5TH LEICESTERS. SEVERELY
WOUNDED IN THE ATTACK ON PONTRUET, AND AWARDED THE
VICTORIA CROSS FOR HIS BRAVERY AND LEADERSHIP DURING
THE ACTION

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held on with tenacity to captured posts against superior forces and under heavy shell fire. An instance of the good work done is afforded by the behaviour of the crew of one of the Stokes mortars knocked out early in the fight. Although shaken by the shelling to which they had been exposed and discouraged by the loss of their gun, these men took to their rifles and fought gallantly throughout the action, killing many of the enemy and taking several prisoners.

The hero of the attack on Pontruet, however, was a subaltern of the 1/5th Leicesters, Lieutenant J. C. Barrett. He was the leader of a party attacking the strong and stoutly-defended work known as Forgan's Trench. In spite of an intense fire from the machine guns and riflemen defending the trench, he led a party of men against it, and, although wounded in the advance to the attack, he succeeded in reaching the trench and sprang into it, himself disposing of two machine guns and inflicting many casualties. During the mêlée which followed he was again severely wounded, but managed to climb out of the trench with the object of finding out his own exact position and locating the enemy. This he succeeded in doing, and, despite loss of blood and the exhaustion consequent on his wounds, gave detailed orders to his men, directing them to cut their way back to their battalion, from which they had become isolated. The party managed to rejoin their comrades, but during the retreat Lieutenant Barrett, who had refused offers of help for himself, was again wounded, this time so seriously that he could not move, and was then carried back by his men. It was undoubtedly due to Lieutenant Barrett's splendid example and good leadership that any of the party managed to return alive, and he was subsequently awarded the Victoria Cross for his bravery in this action.

On the 25th of September the first Divisional Order for the main attack on the St. Quentin Canal was issued, and from that time forward all energies were devoted to preparations for the assault. The general idea of the operations was the breaking of the Hindenburg Line north of St. Quentin, and to the 46th Division was assigned the task of storming the Canal between the village of Bellenglise and Riqueval Bridge, and capturing the defences behind the Canal, with Bellenglise itself, which contained the entrance to the famous tunnel whose existence was already well known from statements of captured prisoners. The final objective of the Division was a line on the high ground beyond the villages of Lehaucourt and Magny-la-Fosse. The 1st Division on our right were ordered to protect our right flank and to hold themselves in readiness to advance eastwards south of the Canal and conform to the movements of the enemy should he retire, occupying the village of Thorigny and the high ground around that village. In the event, the enemy resistance proved too stubborn on the day of the attack; the 1st Division did not advance; Thorigny was not taken until the following day, and artillery and machine-gun fire from the high ground on our right flank was the cause of much trouble during the later stages of the battle.

On our left the 30th American Division was ordered to storm the Bellicourt defences and cross the Canal where it disappeared underground in the Bellicourt Tunnel. Then, turning south, they were to join our own troops in the neighbourhood of Etricourt. The Americans, however, also experienced considerable resistance and were delayed in reaching their final objectives, thus leaving this flank also in the air for some time.

It was intended, finally, that when the final objective

were reached by ourselves and the 30th American Division, the 32nd British Division and the 2nd Australian Division should pass through and exploit success, seizing if possible the general line Le Tronquay-Levergies and to the north.

In order to fully realize the magnitude of the task which confronted the Division, a short description of the defences opposed to us is necessary. The front line occupied by our troops on the date when the attack was first ordered has already been described. Immediately in front of our line the country dipped towards the St. Quentin Canal. The main natural features were two steepish ravines roughly at right angles to the Canal—one to the left of our positions, down which ran the main Vadencourt Road over Riqueval Bridge, the road known to us as Watling Street ; and the other ravine facing towards Bellenglise. Across the ridge between these two ravines ran the first strong system of German defences—a continuous line of trenches protected by a broad belt of wire and with frequent strong-points and machine-gun posts.

At either flank of the divisional sector the main crossings of the Canal—Bellenglise and Riqueval Bridges—were further protected by more belts of wire and by well-sited posts of machine gunners and riflemen.

The St. Quentin Canal on the front to be attacked by the 46th Division was in itself an obstacle which might easily have proved insuperable in the face of a determined enemy. The mere sight of it from our front line trenches inspired respect, and might well have caused fear of the outcome of the attack in the hearts of any but the stoutest soldiers. It divided naturally into two portions. The northern half, whilst less strongly prepared for defence, was much more of a natural obstacle than the southern. From Riqueval Bridge to opposite La Baraque cross-

roads, the Canal runs between almost perpendicular cliffs, which for the greater part of this distance vary between fifty and thirty feet high. South of this it runs practically at ground level with, in places, a slight embankment. Right throughout, the Canal wall formed a perpendicular obstacle faced with brick, both west and east banks being strongly wired. The southern portion of the Canal was practically dry, but over considerably more than half of the front covered by the Division a depth of from six to eight feet of water had to be reckoned with.

In addition to the natural strength of the Canal as an obstacle to advancing troops, no pains had been spared to strengthen the whole length, which bristled with well-sited concrete and steel machine-gun emplacements, and had been generally rendered as nearly as possible impregnable. Indeed, we know from statements of German prisoners that it was considered by them to be capable of defence against any possible attack. It is probable that this fact helped to lull the Germans into a false state of security which may in a measure have been responsible for the fact that all our preparations passed unheeded and that the attack did not seem to have been suspected until it actually took place.

The two weak points about the Canal which were destined to have a decisive effect on the outcome of the battle were: (1) the bridges which were necessary for the supply of the enemy troops on the western bank, and so could not be destroyed in good time; and (2) the existence of certain concrete dams which had presumably been built by the enemy to serve as locks to retain the water. Where the Canal crosses the valley of the Omignon, south of Bellenglise, it is banked up above the level of the surrounding country; and without these concrete



AIR PHOTOGRAPH OF THE ST. QUENTIN CANAL AT BELLEGLISE, SHOWING THE
DEFENCE SYSTEM TO THE EAST OF THE CANAL AND THE GERMAN BRIDGES.

dams, there was risk of our guns breaching the banks, allowing the water to drain away, and so diminishing the value of the Canal as an obstacle.

These concrete dams would certainly have served their purpose in such an event, but, although protected above by strips of concertina wire and on their sides by "crows' feet" and other devices, they were a possible means of our troops crossing. There were several of these stoutly built dams along the divisional front, and some of them were actually made use of by the Infantry in the assault.

Beyond the Canal was an extremely strong system of trenches, heavily protected by wire belts, and based upon the village of Bellenglise, the farm of La Baraque, and Harry and Nigger Copses. This line was continued parallel with the Canal to Lehaucourt; but the portion south of Bellenglise was not directly assaulted by our troops, being attacked from the rear by the Brigade detailed to advance on Lehaucourt itself. Between Bellenglise and Magny-la-Fosse were two more continuous lines of trenches protected by wire, while all over the ground to be traversed were sited individual strong-points and machine-gun emplacements disposed after the principle of "defence in depth" much used by the Germans in the last two years of the war.

Altogether, the defences of the Hindenburg Line at this point were as thorough as the science of military engineering, backed by unlimited time and labour, could devise, and the defenders had every reason to believe that no troops in the world could be expected to storm them without colossal losses.

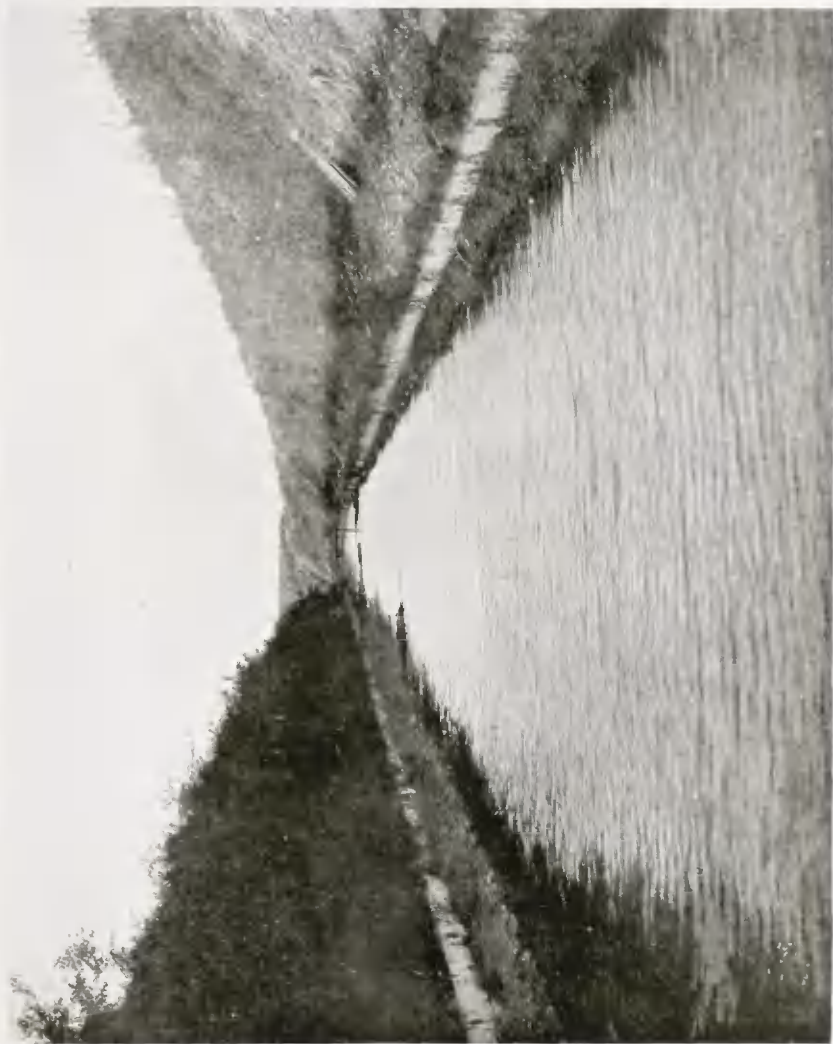
The effect of the battle of the 29th September must be considered in the light of these facts. The confidence of the Germans in both their troops and their defence

system was fated to be shattered in one mighty blow, and the effect of this reverse on the *moral* of the German Army and the German people must have been tremendous indeed.

The fall of St. Quentin following on the breaching of the Hindenburg Line was inevitable. Perhaps the best tribute to the work of the Division on this day of days in their history is seen in the remark of a staff officer of another formation, who, in reply to a question as to who took the city of St. Quentin, replied: "The French walked into St. Quentin, but the 46th Division captured it when they took Bellenglise."

On the evening of the 27th September the 138th Infantry Brigade, then holding the northern portion of our line, was ordered to attack the trenches on the ridge between the two ravines west of Bellenglise and Riqueval. This preliminary operation was quite local, and was undertaken with the object of ensuring that our troops should meet with little resistance west of the Canal on the day of the main assault. All went well with the attack. After a preliminary bombardment, the companies of the 4th Leicesters detailed for the assault left the forming-up line in good order, and, following the barrage closely, occupied the line of trenches which was their objective without difficulty and with very little fighting. The attack resulted in the capture of two officers and one hundred and forty-six other ranks, and all concerned had good reason to be satisfied with the work, and to trust that it was an omen of greater success to follow shortly, when the preparations for the attack on the Canal were completed.

Our new line was immediately consolidated, and communication trenches leading towards the enemy were blocked; and at the conclusion of this operation the



ST. QUENTIN CANAL SHOWING THE BRICK FACING OF THE CANAL AND ITS STEEP BANKS.
IN THE DISTANCE THE REMAINS OF A GERMAN FOOTBRIDGE.

137th Infantry Brigade relieved the 138th Infantry Brigade, who retired to the area about Le Verguier for a short rest.

The relief took place without trouble, though the enemy subjected the captured positions to a desultory fire throughout the night, but at 7 a.m. on the 28th September bombing attacks were commenced on the outpost company of the 5th South Staffords, and at 10 a.m. the enemy counter-attacked heavily under a barrage on the whole front which had been the scene of our attack of the evening before.

The attack was accompanied by heavy artillery fire on our support positions and on the main lines of communication up which reinforcements and supplies for the troops occupying the captured trenches would have to pass. The infantry attack was pressed by the enemy with unusual determination, bombing parties working up the communication trenches leading from the enemy's positions as well as across the open. Severe in-and-out fighting continued for some hours, and the outpost companies were very hard pressed and finally were forced to yield ground owing to the impossibility of keeping the troops supplied with S.A.A. and bombs. The attack was particularly severe on the front held by the outpost company of the 1/5th South Staffords, and after an hour and a half's fighting the enemy forced their way into the trenches held by this company. A local counter-attack was at once organized, however, and the Germans were driven out.

Later in the morning this company was once more driven back, fighting every step of the way, but gradually running out of small-arm ammunition and bombs. By this time 60 per cent. of the company had become casualties, and it was forced to withdraw to the trenches

south-west of Pike Wood, where it was reorganized and held on until dark.

Similar fine work was done by the 1/6th North Staffords during the attack. The outpost company of this battalion was for six hours completely cut off from communication with Battalion Headquarters, all lines having been cut by artillery fire. The company, however, held on to its position against superior numbers for the whole of this time, although suffering very much from the prevailing lack of ammunition. Casualties were very high, but the men, inspired by the heroic example of their officers, fought with an utter disregard of personal safety, inflicting heavy losses on the attackers, who were only able to make very insignificant gains of ground. Where all the men did so well it is difficult to draw distinctions, but prominence should be given to the work of Private B. Mountford, of the 1/6th North Staffords, who during the shortage of ammunition was mainly responsible for saving the situation on the front occupied by his company. Finding a German machine gun and ammunition in the captured trenches, he at once set to work, got the gun into working order, brought it into action, and caused many casualties to the enemy. For five hours under heavy fire from German rifles and machine guns he manned this gun, firing short bursts of fire when enemy attacks appeared likely to develop with success, thus assisting materially in slowing down his advance and helping to repulse thrusts which were unusually determined and long-sustained.

Fighting continued well on into the day, but after his initial success the enemy made very little progress along any part of the front attacked. With few exceptions our men were able to retain their positions until dark, but the outpost companies were in a very unfavourable

position, being observed and enfiladed from both flanks. It was therefore decided to withdraw to our original line under cover of darkness, not only because the position of the men was unsatisfactory, but in order that a straight barrage could be put down for the main attack.

During the few days of preparation, every care was taken to prevent the enemy from realizing the imminence and magnitude of the attack. Reconnoitring parties were warned to keep themselves scattered and as inconspicuous as possible when in view of the enemy. There was to be no flourishing of maps in full view of enemy airmen or of direct observation from the enemy trenches. All troops in the front line were instructed to keep their heads down and to let as little movement as possible be seen, while movement of transport behind the lines, beyond the normal activity inseparable from the supply and maintenance of a division in comparatively peaceful times, was restricted to the hours of darkness.

The enemy airmen at this time were very active and daring, and frequently his reconnaissance machines would, in spite of machine-gun and rifle fire, swoop down and pass over our front and support trenches at a very low altitude, watching for signs of unusual activity. With their scarlet-painted bodies the machines presented a striking appearance, looking for all the world like huge red birds diving down on the look-out for their prey on the ground beneath. Very little could have escaped the knowledge of the skilled observers in the planes, and the result speaks well for the thoroughness of the precautions taken against observation, and for the skill with which officers and men carried out the orders given to them.

One of the first preparations to be made in all cases of attack where moves of Headquarters are likely to

take place as a preliminary to the assault, is the choosing of suitable sites for the Headquarters of the higher formations. On the 26th, therefore, a party of the General Staff, with one representative from each Brigade and the O.C. Signal Company, made a tour of the country behind the front line and of the front line itself, and settled on a joint Brigade Headquarters in a portion of the line where three or four deep dug-outs, sufficient to shelter the Staffs from moderately heavy shell fire, existed. This position, unnamed except by a map reference (G, 21, c, 2.1), subsequently became the headquarters of the 137th Infantry Brigade when this Brigade stormed the Canal, and was later used as Divisional Headquarters by the 32nd Division when it passed through the 46th Division after the attack. At the same time it was decided to move forward Advanced Divisional Headquarters to Small Post Wood, a small copse about a mile N.N.E. of Vendelles, from which place communication forward could be maintained more satisfactorily.

The problem of communication in a battle such as the one projected was a difficult one. Both our own troops and the enemy were strongly entrenched, and a preliminary bombardment of exceptional intensity was necessary before our assaulting columns could be hurled at the enemy entrenchments with any chance of success, while such a bombardment necessarily invited heavy retaliatory fire. It was practically a trench warfare attack without the buried cable system which alone had rendered communication in trench warfare possible.

A strong system of overland cables was designed to meet the case, but these lines were, as they were bound to be, cut by shell fire again and again before the attack commenced. In fact, the party laying the forward lines was out working during the whole of the night preceding

the attack, and during the morning of the attack, without succeeding in getting the lines through to the leading Brigade, which was thus for some time, at a critical period of the battle, cut off from communication with the Division altogether. To add to the troubles of the Signal company, the very openness of the country, while facilitating the laying of cables across country, was fatal to their maintenance. During the dark nights of the 27th/28th and 28th/29th September, transport made little or no attempt to keep to the roads, but was driven across country, intent only on reaching its destination by the shortest route. Lines were cut not once or twice, but twenty or thirty times a night, and linemen were out working practically continuously. Perhaps the most exasperating incident occurred, however, when, on the night before the battle, a cavalry unit which shall be nameless settled down for the night midway between Divisional Headquarters and an important forward communication post, and signalized its arrival by cutting out some hundred yards or so of the three twin cables which formed the main divisional route, in order to use them as a picket line for their horses. After this "Signals" felt that Fate could have no harder blows in store for them.

Communications had to be extended considerably and lines laid to deal with the many extra units which were attached to the Division for the battle. New signal officers appeared every few minutes, bringing with them N.C.O.s dragging new lines to be placed on the Divisional Exchange. Tanks, Cavalry, Artillery, Cyclists—all were represented—but the most numerous of all were the attached Artillery Brigades. Between the arrival of the Division in the area and the night of the 28th September, the strength of the Division in artillery increased from two Brigades of R.F.A. to eight Brigades of R.F.A. and

one of R.H.A., all of them being placed under the command of Brigadier-General Sir Hill Child, C.M.G., D.S.O., C.R.A., 46th Division. In addition several Brigades of the Corps Heavy Artillery were firing on the front of the Division.

Artillery preparation for the attack was commenced on the night of the 26th/27th September, when a concentrated bombardment of the Bellenglise salient was carried out with a mixture of high explosive and gas shells. At the same time the normal "harassing" fire on the whole of the IX Corps front was considerably increased in order to mask the guns engaged in pumping gas into selected areas behind the front to be attacked. This gas bombardment was carried out on a scale which had not previously been attempted by any of the Allies, but results were not commensurate with the expenditure of ammunition. Prisoners stated that the only effect of the bombardment, so far as gas was concerned, was to cause them to retreat to the deep dug-outs and tunnels with which this particular enemy area was so plentifully provided, and thus very few gas casualties were caused.

Far otherwise, however, was the result of the destructive bombardment with high-explosive shells from guns of all calibres which commenced on the following day. All evidence, whether that of air photographs taken during the bombardment itself, the close examination of the shelled area when the battle was over, or the reports of the dazed and demoralized prisoners taken during the action, goes to show that the effect of the whirlwind of shells from our guns was absolutely devastating both to the German positions and to their *moral*. For the two days preceding the assault no rations or reinforcements reached the unfortunate occupants of the defences on either bank of the Canal.

This intensive artillery preparation was carried on without pause until the morning selected for the attack. In the meantime, careful barrage time-tables had been worked out for the attack itself, and every gun of the Field Artillery had been assigned its task, either in the barrage which should cover the advance of the infantry, in the shelling of specially selected areas where enemy concentrations might be expected, or in assisting the Heavy Artillery in its task of neutralizing or annihilating suspected enemy strong-points and machine-gun emplacements.

In an attack on a position which is fronted by a water obstacle of the size and depth of the St. Quentin Canal it is naturally to be expected that towards the overcoming of that obstacle a large and even dominating part of the preparation for the attack should be directed. The crossing of the Canal was the task of the Infantry, but the work of enabling the Infantry to cross was essentially the rôle of the Engineers, and the preparations made by the C.R.E., Lieutenant-Colonel H. T. Morshead, D.S.O., R.E., were extremely thorough.

Unfortunately the C.R.E. himself, while reconnoitring forward routes for pontoon wagons in the vicinity of Le Verguier on the 25th, was wounded in the leg by a piece of a shell which exploded near him, and his wound, though not serious, was sufficient to incapacitate him for some weeks.

In his absence, and until his successor, Lieutenant-Colonel W. Garforth, D.S.O., M.C., R.E., joined the Division, the R.E. preparation was carried out under the direction of the Adjutant and Assistant Adjutant. These preparations consisted mainly in the collection of material for, and the construction of, various means of crossing the Canal. Amongst the most successful of the means

devised were small piers built of a framework of wood supported either by empty petrol tins or by bundles of cork slabs : piers which were so devised that they could be used either as rafts to carry a single man across the Canal or as supports for foot-bridges for taking a continuous stream of men in single file. In addition collapsible boats had been provided, together with mud-mats and scaling-ladders for negotiating stretches of mud and the steep brick walls of the Canal banks. Finally, some genius hit on the novel idea of making use of life-belts on a considerable scale. The latter idea in particular promised considerable prospects of success ; the authorities at Boulogne were telegraphed for the life-belts from some of the leave-boats, and over 3,000 were collected and were sent up and issued to the storming troops.

On the 27th September arrangements were made for a dress rehearsal to take place, and men loaded with full kit as for a storming party were detailed to test each type of means for crossing the Canal. The first attempt was made near Bihecourt, but enemy shelling of batteries in the vicinity was so persistent and interfered so much with the preparations for the trial that it was postponed by order of General Campbell until the next day. On the 28th, therefore, the party proceeded to the moat at Brie Château on the Somme, where the practice was carried out in front of the Divisional Commander in the pouring rain, but with good results. It was discovered by actual experience that the collapsible boats, which required four men apiece to carry them, could be opened and launched in twenty seconds, while men, weighted with their storming kit but supported with life-belts fixed high up on their bodies, were able to swim across a stretch of deep water, forty yards in breadth, and could not drown. Similar experiments were made with a man who

could not swim, and he was able by means of a life-line to pull himself across hand over hand, being convinced, and in a position to convince his companions, that there was no danger of men thus equipped getting into difficulties. These trials were actually carried out by men of the Stafford Brigade, which was to have the honour of leading the Division across the Canal and making the initial breach in the Hindenburg Line beyond.

The trial having been successful, nothing now remained but to continue the manufacture of the different devices until the number required was completed and, during the night of the 28th/29th, to collect all this material as close as possible to the front line, ready to be carried forward to the appointed places on the banks of the Canal at the first opportunity after the attack had been launched. This was successfully accomplished by the personnel of the Divisional Field Companies, assisted by the 1/1st Monmouthshire Regiment, the Pioneer Battalion of the Division. The Engineers, including the whole of the Engineers of the 32nd Division, were then divided up according to the tasks allotted to them for the assault. Some sections were sent with the Infantry to assist mopping-up parties and to examine dug-outs, strong-points, etc., for mines and demolition charges; others were told off respectively as bridge-building parties or for work on the roads leading to and forward of the horse-transport bridges which were to be thrown across the Canal as soon as possible after the assault had succeeded.

CHAPTER II

THE STAFFORDS CROSS THE ST. QUENTIN CANAL AND BREACH THE HINDENBURG LINE

PREPARATIONS being sufficiently far advanced by that date, the 29th September was chosen as "Z" day, or the day of the attack, and the night of the 28th/29th was spent by the General Staff and Headquarter Administrative Services in putting the final touches to the plans to which I have already referred, and to arrangements for the evacuation of the wounded, and for dealing with the inrush of enemy prisoners which might be expected if the attack was successful. During the same time the fighting troops were moving up to their assembly positions. The 137th Infantry Brigade, composed entirely of Staffordshire troops, under Brigadier-General J. V. Campbell, V.C., C.M.G., D.S.O., had been chosen to lead the Division in the assault on the Canal ; and the Headquarters of this Brigade was moved on this night to the dug-outs in the support line of trenches which had already been selected for them. The troops themselves were disposed on the forming-up line which had been taped out under the direction of Engineer officers, the tapes being laid parallel to, and two hundred yards behind, the starting-line for the creeping barrage.

The troops of the supporting Brigade, the 138th Infantry Brigade of Leicesters and Lincolns, under Brigadier-General F. G. M. Rowley, C.M.G., D.S.O., and the 139th



BRIGADIER-GENERAL J. V. CAMPBELL, V.C., C.M.G., D.S.O., BRIGADE
COMMANDER 137TH INFANTRY BRIGADE

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Infantry Brigade of Sherwood Foresters, under Brigadier-General J. Harington, D.S.O., were also moved up into their positions during the night. They were thus disposed so that immediately the situation had cleared sufficiently, they could move forward to the forming-up position at which they were to take over from the 137th Infantry Brigade and continue to press the attack until the final objectives of the Division were reached and consolidated.

Similar positions for Brigade Headquarters had been selected, and the troops of both Brigades were concentrated where as much shelter as possible from the enemy's retaliatory fire was available, in order to avoid unnecessary casualties. Casualties in all three Brigades were caused during the night by enemy gas and high explosive shells, and work was much interfered with by this shelling, which, however, died away towards morning, giving satisfactory proof that the enemy did not anticipate any immediate attack on a large scale.

The general dispositions of the Division for the attack were as follows:—

The area to be occupied had been divided into two main objectives, each limited by a line running almost due north and south. These were marked respectively on the map issued by the General Staff before the action by a *red* and a *green* line, and for convenience of reference may be referred to as the Red and the Green objectives.

These main objectives were again subdivided, the first into two portions by a *blue* line, and the second into three approximately equal portions by a *green* and a *dotted blue* line. These subdivisions were made to enable the assaulting troops to rest and reorganize under a protective barrage of a few minutes' duration, and each line was chosen as being either a definite element of the

enemy organization or a natural feature of the ground over which the attack was taking place.

Their positions would, of course, also be indicated by the halt of the artillery barrage behind which the troops would organize. The intermediate objectives were made use of to enable "leap-frog" tactics to be utilized within the attacking Brigades—one battalion passing through another to the attack, the tired battalion meanwhile remaining behind to mop up and consolidate a defensive line, while it was at the same time available to reinforce the fresh attacking battalion if necessary.

To the 137th Infantry Brigade, as already stated, was allotted the task of leading the Division across the Canal. This Brigade was detailed to overcome any enemy resistance west of the Canal, to cross the Canal itself, break through the main defences of the Hindenburg Line east of the Canal, capture Bellenglise, and advance to the Red objective, where a defensive position was to be consolidated and the other Brigades would pass through to continue the attack.

On this line the artillery barrage under which the troops advanced was scheduled to halt for three hours, a dense protective barrage being put down meanwhile to cover the work of consolidation, to conceal the movements of the advancing Brigades, and to prevent enemy counter-attacks.

During this interval of three hours the troops told off for the purpose were to complete the mopping-up of the area occupied by the 137th Infantry Brigade, and the remaining two Brigades, the 138th Infantry Brigade on the left and the 139th Infantry Brigade on the right, were to move up, deploy on the Red objective, and, when the barrage lifted, to move forward to the capture of the Green objective, where they in their turn were to

consolidate and allow the 32nd Division to pass through them to a distant objective. As will be seen the programme allotted was, so far as the 46th Division was concerned, carried through according to plan. To the storming Infantry was allotted a few sections of Engineers for purposes as already outlined when describing Engineer preparations, while the remainder of the Divisional Engineers and the Pioneer Battalion followed close in the rear of the assaulting columns, bringing up bridging and road-making material.

The artillery programme has already been referred to above. The particular feature of both the creeping barrages was the inclusion of a proportion of "smoke" shell, this being intended to aid the concealment of movement behind our lines, and also to emphasize the "lifts" of the barrage, thus enabling the Infantry to judge more easily when a forward move was taking place. Certainly the first object of the "smoke" was achieved, though how far the artificial smoke was aided by natural fog is difficult to estimate. Owing to the fog, however, the second object was not so successful, and the lifts were not so well defined as they would have been in clear weather. In order to thicken the barrage in its initial stages, a machine-gun barrage was arranged to be super-imposed upon it. For this purpose the 2nd Life Guards M.G. Battalion and the 100th M.G. Battalion were attached to the Division, and placed under the command of the O.C. 46th M.G. Battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel D. Mathew Lannowe, D.S.O.

Two companies of tanks had been detailed by the IX Corps to cross over the Bellicourt Tunnel as soon as the Americans on the left of the Division had captured their first objectives. They were then to move down south on to the front of the 46th Division, when they

were to assist the 138th and 139th Infantry Brigades, one company of tanks to each Brigade, in the advance from the Red line.

Forming-up was successfully carried out on the night before the attack, the 137th Infantry Brigade lining up on the jumping-off tape on a three-battalion front ; while the 138th and 139th Infantry Brigades formed up some distance in rear on a one-battalion front, with orders that their leading battalions should occupy our old front line as soon as the attacking Brigade had left. These leading battalions were instructed to detail one company each to follow the assaulting troops closely and assist in mopping up the area west of the Canal. At the same time the battalion commanders were instructed to hold themselves in readiness to reinforce the 137th Infantry Brigade should this Brigade, having crossed the Canal, be in danger of being outfought in the trench system beyond it. The remainder of the supporting Brigades were instructed not to move forward until orders were received from Divisional Headquarters.

Zero hour was fixed for 5.50 a.m. on September 29th.

Even without an intimate knowledge of the ground a study of the trench-map of the Canal defences will show the magnitude of the task which confronted the attacking Brigade. Well might the enemy be of the opinion that their positions were impregnable. As zero hour approached there was no thought of rest for the Staff who had planned the attack, and who realized how much might hang on the result of the next few hours. If the attack proceeded according to schedule, there was no end to the possibilities opened up. Indeed, the end of the war would be brought very appreciably nearer. A suc-

cessful attack on positions so strong as those opposed to us would be proof positive that the enemy's hopes of holding up the Allied tide of conquest by building a series of such dams across Europe were founded on folly. On the other hand, if the attack was vigorously pressed and failed, the chances were that the rôle of the 46th Division in the present war was played for good and all.

As the hours rolled on towards the fateful moment when the barrage was due to open, a hush of expectancy seemed to settle over the whole front of the Division. The enemy fire was fitful—an occasional shell, only, falling on such well-known targets as "The Tumulus," Hudson's Post, or the roads and tracks through Ascension Valley, the most shell-torn area behind our lines. Our own artillery fired sporadically, guns having been told off to simulate an appearance of normal activity. Suddenly, to the minute agreed upon, the preliminary gun of the barrage boomed forth and, in a second, flashes appeared to spring from every square yard of the "gun-lines," while a perfect tornado of furious sound, a hellish compound of the voices of guns of all calibres, rent the air and caused the very earth to shake. The enemy lines were already hidden in thick mist, so that the grandest sight of a modern battle—the striking of the steel storm on his front—was hidden from the sight of the watchers in our trenches, though the crash and roar of the exploding shells was proof enough of what was happening in front of us. As the barrage opened, officers and men of the leading Brigade gave a sigh of relief from the intolerable tension of the preparation; the men sprang from their forming-up positions and, led by their officers, poured down the slopes toward the nearest enemy trenches, keeping close to the barrage. In these initial stages of the attack, direction was maintained fairly well, in spite

of the thickening of the mist due to the smoke from the shells, which soon produced an impenetrable fog. Keeping direction in an early-morning attack is a sign of good leadership at the best of times, but on this foggy day—when, even behind the lines so far back as Divisional Headquarters, officers and men were wandering about in vain endeavour to find their way—it required positive genius to succeed in leading straight to pre-arranged objectives. A certain amount of confusion did result from this fact, but fortunately the very nature of the obstacles to be encountered helped the advancing troops, and the Brigade fell upon the first-line trenches in fair order and fleshed their bayonets, killing most of the garrison, who, to do them justice, in spite of the barrage and their surprise at the unexpected attack, put up a stout enough resistance. Taking this first system of trenches in their stride and leaving stray Germans and individual strong-points to be dealt with by the mopping-up parties of the supporting companies, the Staffordshire men, with barely a pause to reorganize, swept on to the banks of the Canal well up to time, whilst the 1st Division, in accordance with Corps orders for the battle, formed a strong defensive right flank from our original trenches along the spur towards Bellenglise.

The enemy barrage fell on our trenches five minutes after the troops had left, showing that, while his batteries were on the alert, no particular attack had been expected. By that time, our troops were fighting in the enemy outpost line, and suffered very few casualties from his shells. His Artillery Command, however, were quick to realize that their guns were not likely to do much to hinder our attack unless the range was shortened, and, before our troops were over the Canal, they took the risk of shooting down their

own men who would be intermingled with ours and, in a last attempt to smother the attack on the Canal, laid down a barrage just to the west of it. This was well-directed and powerful, and caused many casualties to all three of the attacking battalions before the Canal was crossed.

The attack was carried out on a three-battalion front, the 1/6th South Staffords being on the right, the 1/5th South Staffords in the centre, and the 1/6th North Staffords on the left. All three battalions reached the west bank of the Canal without too much difficulty, though here and there individual companies were held up by machine-gun posts and opportunity was thus given for the display of initiative by officers and N.C.O.s in overcoming these obstacles. The experiences of the different battalions at the Canal and beyond it, however, differ to such a marked extent that a clearer view of the action can be obtained if their adventures are considered separately and in detail.

On the right the 6th South Staffords attacked in four waves, each of one company, on a front of four hundred yards. Few casualties were suffered in overrunning the German outpost line, and on reaching the Canal it was found to be dry, or nearly dry, on almost the whole battalion front. What little water existed was on the left, and here officers swam across, taking lines with them, their men following without much difficulty on rafts, or by pulling themselves along the life-lines already placed in position by the officers. In the centre and on the right of the battalion front, the attacking troops waded across, or crossed by means of rafts of cork and petrol tins thrown down on the mud in front of them. There was a little wire under the water—where water existed—near the eastern bank of the Canal, but this did

not give much trouble. The enemy defended the eastern bank of the Canal with bombs, and with machine guns which were sited in concrete emplacements so arranged as to enfilade the Canal. The sting had been taken out of the resistance, however, by the intensity of the barrage, which had been so heavy, so well directed, and so closely followed up by our Infantry, that in many cases garrisons of enemy strong-points and trenches were unable to emerge before the positions were rushed by the advancing troops. For a few minutes some difficulty was experienced in gaining a footing on the eastern bank, but, owing to the fog, accurate machine-gun fire at anything but point-blank range was impossible and considerable parties of our men made good their positions. The enemy then surrendered freely, prisoners being collected in batches and sent back under the care of one or two slightly wounded men.

As soon as the machine-gun nests and posts immediately on the bank of the Canal had been cleared sufficiently to enable our men to deploy, the officers sorted out their commands as far as possible, and the leading companies advanced to the attack of the Blue line, a continuous line of trenches with numerous and well-constructed strong-points.

Great as the task had been, the crossing was accomplished up to time ; the reorganization of the companies engaged took place under a protective barrage as arranged, and the advance to the Blue line was commenced as soon as the barrage lifted, at zero plus one hour and forty minutes.

Here again, the troops were faced with an obstacle that might well have sufficed to hold them up for several hours and the trench system was very stubbornly defended, enemy machine gunners fighting well, many of

them being bayoneted at their guns. Nothing could withstand the dash of the troops, however, inspired as they were by the splendid leading of their officers. In small parties and protected by the fog, they worked their way up to within a short distance of the enemy trenches, then, rising with a shout, dashed in with the bayonet, the enemy giving way in all directions and many of them making good their escape through the fog, in spite of considerable casualties inflicted by the artillery as they retired.

At the Blue line, a slight pause was made while the much disorganized companies sorted themselves out as far as possible—N.C.O.s collecting small parties of men, and officers rearranging these parties into platoons and companies, and explaining to the section leaders under them their next objective in the attack on the Red line, which was commenced immediately the barrage lifted and permitted forward movement to be resumed.

A slight adjustment had to be made first, however, and the first and third companies advanced behind the creeping barrage, while the second and fourth companies turned aside, changing direction to the right and entering Bellenglise.

The organized defences of this village had meanwhile been dealt with as a possible menace to the attack to right and left of them. Special groups of heavy artillery had been told off to pay particular attention to them and, during the initial stages of the assault, Bellenglise had been so well pounded that the machine gunners and Infantry holding the village had had little opportunity to assist in repulsing the general attack.

Now, in accordance with plan—a phrase common enough in German communiqués but significant in the present connection—the heavy guns switched on to the

villages of Lehaucourt and Magny-la-Fosse, which lay within the objectives of the leap-frogging Brigades, and the Infantry rushed in on the village of Bellenglise and mopped it up, paying particular attention to the cellars and the entrances to the famous Bellenglise tunnel. It was from this tunnel that the 137th Infantry Brigade drew the greater part of the prisoners captured by them, nearly a thousand officers and men being discovered in this retreat alone.

Having thus accomplished their task the battalion, which had suffered surprisingly few casualties, proceeded to organize the Red line, in which task they were much hampered by enemy machine-gun fire from the eastern end of Magny Valley, until this harassing fire was finally silenced by some of our own Lewis gun detachments. Runners were then despatched to the rear with the news that the first objective had been taken, and the men found what shelter they could and settled down to rest, prepared to repulse a counter-attack should any be made.

The centre battalion, the 1/5th South Staffords, who were detailed to attack on a somewhat wider front than the troops on their right, formed up with two companies in line, each on a frontage of 500 yards.

Owing to the severe casualties this battalion had suffered while repulsing the enemy counter-attacks on the 28th September, the orders for the attack were altered at the last moment, the third and fourth companies being combined into one supporting company. When the battalion advanced to the attack of the trenches west of the Canal, the right company, owing to the fog and smoke, lost direction and bore slightly too far to the right. This error of direction was detected in time by the battalion commander, however, and under his orders the gap be-

tween the two companies was filled by a section of the 137th Trench Mortar Battery. Here again, little trouble was experienced in overrunning the enemy trench system west of the Canal, from which 160 prisoners were taken and despatched to the rear under escort.

The Canal itself contained at this point deep water and, no bridges being found intact, the men who, in common with all the assaulting troops, were equipped with life-belts in addition to their normal equipment, crossed by swimming or were hauled over by means of heaving lines and planks. It was in such a situation as this that the fog proved so invaluable. The farther bank of the Canal was strongly defended by the enemy with rifle fire and light machine guns fired from concrete emplacements, but at this period of the day it was impossible to see more than a few yards, and the enemy could not tell with any certainty where our troops were until they were right upon them, when the latter lost no time in charging, and quickly silenced the enemy machine guns by the destruction of the guns' crews. So quickly indeed was progress made, that comparatively few casualties were suffered in this very difficult operation. This was again in great measure due to the splendid leading of both officers and N.C.O.s. Any hesitation at this juncture would have been fatal and might have resulted in the total failure of the attack. It was absolutely essential for success that the troops should keep up with the barrage and make the utmost use of the fog. The courage and determination of all ranks was beyond praise, but, even at this high level, certain individual leaders did so extraordinarily well and showed such resource and initiative that their efforts had a marked effect in the storming of the Canal.

Such an instance is that of Corporal A. E. Ferguson,

who, after overcoming all resistance on the west side of the Canal, collected together his own section and a party of men from different units who had become lost in the fog, and personally led them across the Canal, scaling the east bank against considerable opposition, chasing the enemy down their own dug-outs, and clearing the trench line opposed to him. In this way, this N.C.O., with a small party of about fifteen men, was responsible for the capture of ninety-eight prisoners and ten machine guns. Another name which will remain associated with the capture of this portion of the Canal is that of Sergeant W. Cahill who, although unable to swim, plunged into the Canal and got across as best he could with a number of men he had collected round him. These men he at once led to the top of the eastern bank, where he found an officer and a small party of our men in difficulties. Without hesitation he attacked the enemy, captured four machine guns, and held on to his position on the Canal bank until the remainder of our men had crossed and the enemy resistance was completely overcome.

The thickness of the fog had caused the companies at this point to be very mixed up indeed, and other similar cases occurred of parties composed of men of several different units being collected by an officer who had lost his own men. Second Lieutenant W. B. Brown, collecting a small party of twenty men in this manner, plunged into the Canal at the head of them and obtained a footing on the right bank of the Canal, capturing four machine guns and their crews. Having secured this post, he returned into the water and remained waist-deep for nearly an hour, hauling men across, then finally reorganized them and led them forward in the next advance.

In spite of the greater difficulty caused by the water



AIR PHOTOGRAPH OF BELENGLISE AND THE ST. QUENTIN CANAL FROM ABOVE
THE HINDENBURG DEFENCES WEST OF THE CANAL

in the Canal, this battalion also succeeded in keeping up with the barrage on the east bank of the Canal, and re-organized under the protective barrage, before advancing to the capture of the system of trenches beyond. Here the support company joined up with the advanced companies, and the whole moved forward to the Red objective, which was taken without further trouble. One of the companies of the battalion, at this time under Second Lieutenant C. Jones, who had taken over command of the company when his company commander was severely wounded, was detailed to assist the right battalion by clearing the northern portion of the village of Bellenglise. This he did so successfully and speedily that he was able to take it almost in his stride, and advanced with the remaining companies of the battalion to the final objective, after capturing eight machine guns and four field guns on his way. This enemy battery, like many others met with during the day, remained in action until the last moment, when they were surprised by our troops and captured. It is likely that the delay in limbering up and falling back was due in this case to a lack of knowledge of the exact situation owing to the fog, but it is noteworthy that, in this and in subsequent actions in which the Division took part, the enemy artillerymen, like his machine gunners, fought very well indeed. The former manned their guns until the last moment, firing over open sights at our advancing troops, and often fought bravely with their rifles when no longer able to use their guns with effect. Far different was their action from that of the Infantry, who, with a few exceptions, were demoralized from the first, and seldom put up a stiff resistance, surrendering freely, as they did on this occasion, as soon as there was any reasonable excuse for doing so. Had it not been for the machine gunners in

particular the Division could have reached its objective very much quicker and with much fewer casualties than it did, though as it was the success of the attack was phenomenal.

Perhaps the most dramatic scenes of the attack on the Canal occurred on the front attacked by the left battalion, the 1/6th North Staffords. This battalion was given a frontage of attack of 800 yards, and formed up with two companies in line and two in support. It was known to the staff that the Riqueval Bridge on the left of the battalion objective was the main artery of supply for the German troops on the west side of the Canal and that this bridge had remained undestroyed up to the previous evening. There was therefore a possible chance of the bridge being seized intact, and Captain A. H. Charlton with his company were detailed to attempt its capture. This officer led his company by compass bearing towards the bridge, but when descending the ravine leading towards it was held up by machine-gun fire from a trench defending the approach to the bridge. Captain Charlton, realizing the urgency of the situation, took forward a party of nine men, captured the gun, killing all the crew with the bayonet, and then rushed the bridge. The sentries on the bridge and the pioneers who had been detailed to blow it up had been forced to take shelter from our bombardment, but seeing our men approaching rushed out to fire the charges. A race ensued, which was won by the assaulting troops, the nearest N.C.O. shooting all four of the Germans, while the officer seized the leads, cut them, and threw the charges into the Canal. Sentries were then posted on the bridge, and the whole of the company stormed across and mopped up the trenches and enemy posts on the east side of the Canal.



ST. QUENTIN CANAL WITH REQUEVAL BRIDGE. FROM THIS PICTURE THE VALUE OF
CAPTAIN CHARLTON'S WORK IN PRESERVING THE BRIDGE FROM DESTRUCTION IS
WELL SEEN.

In addition to this bridge, on to the repair of which the 466th Field Company was immediately turned, the battalion was fortunate enough to find several foot-bridges over the Canal, and use was also made of a concrete dam of stout construction, from which the enemy's wire was quickly cleared. In consequence of the presence of these bridges little trouble was experienced by this battalion crossing the Canal, and our troops poured over so quickly that the enemy garrison was taken by surprise and was unable to oppose our advance.

The company first over the Riqueval Bridge itself captured 130 prisoners in one trench, including a battalion commander and his staff.

At the Blue line, when the slight pause for reorganization took place, the supporting companies passed through the advanced companies, who in their turn formed up behind them. The whole battalion then swept forward to the capture of their final objective, which was reached by the leading companies immediately after the barrage had passed over it and halted beyond. Here the battalion consolidated, sent up success signals, and despatched runners back to Brigade Headquarters to report.

Thus by 8.30 a.m., in the space of two hours and thirty minutes, exactly according to time-table as laid down by the Divisional Staff, the troops of the 137th Infantry Brigade had overcome enemy opposition west of the St. Quentin Canal, crossed that obstacle, and stormed through a line which the Germans believed to be impregnable, and which had been strengthened with every device that the Masters of modern fortifications could invent. Well might the men of the Brigade, resting on their objectives and awaiting relief by the supporting troops, feel content with their morning's work. Already some 2,000 enemy prisoners were on their way back

towards the divisional cage, and a considerable number of machine guns and field guns were among the captured material. The casualties of the Brigade, including those sustained during the counter-attack of the night of the 27th/28th September, amounted in all to some 25 officers and 555 men. The majority of the wounds were due to machine-gun fire and were comparatively slight, and the total was amazingly small compared with the results gained, being in all probability considerably less than the total of enemy dead and wounded, exclusive of the prisoners already referred to.

CHAPTER III

SUCCESS EXPLOITED BY THE SHERWOODS, LINCOLNS, AND LEICESTERS

WHILE the Infantry of the Division was thus engaged in making history east of the Canal, the administrative services behind were struggling manfully against adverse circumstances. The fog, which had so materially assisted in front, was here the cause of endless trouble and confusion. Elaborate arrangements had been made for the evacuation of the wounded and prisoners, but the fog, which from the beginning of the action had been enough to render path-finding extremely difficult, was intensified to such an extent by the smoke drifting from the scene of action that it was impossible to see more than a few yards ahead. All landmarks were blotted out, and the boundary between tracks ordinarily well enough defined and the open country was indistinguishable. To make confusion worse confounded, the country far and wide was seamed with the occasional ruts made by transport wagons, which in clear weather had been accustomed to avoid tracks as being likely places for the enemy to shell, and to make straight for the particular camp or bivouac which was their destination. The result was that Ascension Valley and the whole region immediately behind the old front line were soon filled with columns of prisoners, returning wounded, stragglers, reinforcements and a medley of orderlies and odds and ends of transport of

every description, wandering about in all directions, and with little hope of finding their way anywhere until the mist cleared. From time to time a slight clearing of the mist would enable men with their wits about them to sight some well-known landmark and to make progress in the right direction, so that gradually the whole mass worked away from the sound of the guns and so drifted back towards Le Verguier, Vadencourt and other posts, where they were sorted out by the Traffic Control, placed on their correct roads, and started off to their destinations. The stream continued, however, and until the fog cleared shortly after noon there was little relief in the situation behind the line. Much suffering must have been caused to the walking wounded through their inability to find the aid-posts prepared for their reception.

The effect of the fog on the Divisional communications was especially noticeable. A complete visual scheme, on which a great deal of energy had been expended, was rendered useless by the fog. Lines which were intact before the fog commenced were continually broken, more by traffic than by shell fire, and, once broken, it was a matter of hours sometimes before the far end of the line, which might have been dragged several hundred yards by transport, could be discovered. Still more difficulty was experienced in laying forward lines during the early stages of the battle. Enemy shelling caused frequent breaks in the lines as they were being laid, and the broken ends, hurled outwards by the force of the explosion, could only be collected and brought together with difficulty, by which time a "test" would betray the fact that a similar accident had occurred farther back, and the whole work was "to do" over again. The remaining resource of "Signals," a system of despatch riders and orderlies, reinforced before the commencement of the action by a

platoon of corps cyclists and a troop of Cavalry, was of more use. But even here trouble was experienced. The roads were badly cut up behind our lines and were non-existent in front of them, so that motor-cycle despatch riders were forced to work on foot. Here again the fog was a serious obstacle; Formation Headquarters were almost undiscoverable, and orderly after orderly left Divisional Headquarters not to return until well on in the afternoon.

In a similar manner, stretcher-bearers going out after wounded cases were again and again lost, and were in some cases several hours before returning to their unit.

One such case is worthy of particular mention as typical of the initiative which was perhaps the most characteristic feature of the behaviour of the rank and file throughout the action, and which helped to make the Battle of Bellenglise, which, like the Battle of Inkerman in the Crimean War, was essentially a soldier's battle, such a marked success.

Private H. Mosley, of the 1/2nd North Midland Field Ambulance, together with Private H. George of the same unit, were attached to the 1/5th Leicesters and followed them up closely in their advance. They then found a wounded infantryman, dressed him, and, having no stretchers with them, they took waterproof sheets from four German prisoners and made them carry the case, intending to make for the Advanced Dressing Station at Jeancourt.

On the way down, groans were heard from a dug-out, so Mosley went down and found six wounded Germans, who gave him to understand that our men had thrown a bomb into the dug-out. The two men dressed the Germans, and, taking waterproof sheets from a further twelve prisoners, they made up rough stretchers and forced these men to carry their wounded comrades.

They then carried on towards the A.D.S., but came across a tank which had been knocked out and from which they drew a wounded officer and two wounded men, whose wounds they dressed, and then made prisoners carry them also.

Near the St. Quentin Canal, the party had to take cover for some time owing to the intense shelling, and during this time three more of the prisoners were wounded. When again able to go forward, another party of twenty Germans was requisitioned and made to take their turn at carrying the patients.

On arrival at the Bellenglise Tunnel, Private Mosley then found four of our own wounded men and six wounded Germans. He therefore foraged around and discovered a party of thirty more German prisoners, dressed the wounded, improvised stretchers in the same manner as before and once more resumed the road to the dressing-station, which was reached without incident and without further addition to the convoy. This now consisted of twenty stretcher cases and seventy-five unwounded prisoners; quite a large enough command for two full privates of the British Army, and one which proved a source of some embarrassment to the British Field Ambulance attached to the Americans, to whom the command was handed over. A rolling stone may not gather moss, but on this occasion the wandering R.A.M.C. private acted rather on the principle of the snowball rolling downhill through fresh snow, and managed to collect as many prisoners as are normally captured as the result of a successful action of some size. The fact that no attempt at escape was made is a significant comment on the *moral* of the German prisoners generally, who in all cases showed a marked desire to reach the British cages.

Meanwhile Divisional Headquarters were anxiously

awaiting some definite news of success, although all rumours pointed that way. The G.O.C. was, however, quite confident that once the Staffords crossed the Canal, he could rely on them being resolutely and closely supported by the Sherwood Foresters, Lincolns, and Leicesters. Every officer and man knew the task ahead and few orders were needed. There was no thought of failure, and every battalion of the Division backed up closely like the members of a trained football team.

At about nine o'clock the welcome news was received from General Campbell that his left and centre battalions had crossed the Canal, though there was no definite news from the right battalion. Later a message came in from Lieutenant Reid, R.F.A., commanding the Divisional Mounted Detachment, that a wounded sergeant had reported definitely that the 8th Sherwoods were crossing the Canal.

It was enough. Orders were instantly issued for the whole Division to press forward to the barrage and to advance straight on their objectives.

The Divisional Commander's confidence in his leaders was fully justified, and before the orders reached the Brigades the troops were already in motion. A great victory appeared to be in sight.

The whole Division was now definitely launched across the Canal. On the south, the 1st Division had gallantly and quickly carried through its task of protecting our flank. From the north reports were at first favourable, but became more disquieting later.

This was, however, no occasion for thinking about flanks; a break-through was intended—and break through we did, holding every yard gained and taking every inch of our allotted objectives.

Perhaps at no time during the battle was better work

done than the feat performed by the officers and guides who were responsible for bringing the 138th and 139th Brigades into position on their forming-up line in time for the final assault from the Red objective. Both west and east of the Canal the roads were choked with the human flotsam and jetsam from the battle, and with transport and details moving towards the front line. The fog was as thick as at any time during the morning, and on occasion it was difficult to see one's hand before one's face, while a great portion of the march had to be made over ill-defined tracks, which were difficult enough to pick out even in moderately clear weather. The compass had to be relied on almost entirely, and the only help received was at the various bridges over the Canal. Here Engineer officers with compasses were able to take bearings and to assist such small companies of men as had been separated from the main column, by giving them the direction they would have to keep in order to reach their correct positions in the line. Here again, as in other phases of the battle, the fog afforded unlimited opportunities for the exercise of the qualities of leadership on the part of subordinate commanders, and seldom indeed did these fail to make the best of a difficult situation.

The new forward move entailed a certain rearrangement of the Artillery, those batteries in position at a distance from our old front line being now firing at extreme range. To adjust matters, the Brigades moved forward immediately the Red objective was reached to positions already selected, where lines of fire had been previously marked out. The forward move was carried out most expeditiously, and the Brigades came into action again and were able to take their part in the creeping barrage when the advance from the Red line was commenced after the three hours' halt. Finally when

the attack had recommenced, three more Brigades in rearward positions ceased fire, limbered up, and moved across No Man's Land, taking up positions between our old front line and the Canal, from which they were able to take their part in the final protective barrage. One of these latter Brigades was heavily shelled and suffered many casualties, and the personnel was withdrawn from the guns for a short time until the worst of the shelling was over.

During the pause between the two phases of the attack, the Engineers of the Division were engaged mainly in superintending the work on forward roads, both west and east of the Canal, and in repairing existing bridges over the Canal. In particular, it was discovered that the stout concrete dam, already mentioned as having been utilized by the Infantry of the 137th Brigade in crossing the Canal, might easily be repaired and adapted to take horsed transport, so with praiseworthy initiative Lieutenant T. H. Midgley, of the 466th Field Company, who had already distinguished himself by his dash during the attack on the Canal, at once set his men to this work. The bridges were repaired or adapted by the early afternoon, and, at 3 p.m., field guns and horsed transport commenced to cross the Canal.

The sections attached to the 137th Infantry Brigade had rendered the Riqueval Bridge serviceable very early in the day, and had withdrawn the demolition charges from several other bridges which had been mined by the enemy, but left by him undestroyed. One N.C.O., Corporal Openshaw of the 466th Field Company, R.E., was in the forefront of the attack on one of the German bridges, personally accounting for a machine-gun nest to the west of the bridge, bayoneting two of the pioneers who were guarding it, and receiving the surrender of the third,

who was able to point out the position of the demolition charges.

In the meantime, the Engineers of the 32nd Division, to whom had been handed over all the pontoons and normal bridging material of our own field companies, were building the pontoon bridges over which their own transport and artillery was to pass that evening and the following day.

During the reconnaissance of the Canal bank and the strengthening of the bridges some 250 of the enemy were discovered and surrendered to the various parties of the field companies, and were sent back under escort.

Another piece of useful work carried out during the afternoon and the following day was the clearing of the Bellenglise Tunnel. In this tunnel many charges were found and removed, and, by happy thought, the German personnel who had been in charge of the electric-light plant were searched for, discovered, and set to work. The mechanics then readily divulged the fact that the German dynamo was connected to a mine, so that the tunnel would be blown up when the engine was started. From this admission to the pointing-out of the mine was but a small step, and the mine was removed and the electric-light plant set working. This proved to be in perfect order, so that the remainder of the search within the tunnel, which incidentally brought to light a certain amount of valuable and interesting signalling and other stores, was carried out by the light of a German electric plant worked by German soldiers.

At 11.20 a.m., the barrage commenced to move forward from its protective position in front of the Red line, and the troops of the 138th and 139th Infantry Brigades, keeping close behind it, advanced towards the line of trenches which formed the main obstacle on the way to

the next objective. The country over which the fresh attack was to take place was of a much more open nature than that which had been the scene of the exploits of the Staffords, and the enemy's defences were not suitably sited for an attack from the direction from which he was now threatened. Towards the southern limit of the objective of the Division the St. Quentin Canal sweeps round at right angles and runs east and west for several thousand yards before bending back again in a south-easterly direction. It was along this portion of the Canal that the assaulting troops would now advance, the Canal itself thus forming a strong defensive flank. The principal support lines of the Hindenburg trench system were disposed parallel to the Canal, and thus ran more or less parallel with the direction of our advance. They had therefore already been partially turned, our troops advancing up them instead of in face of them. The solitary exceptions, and they were exceptions which had to be taken very much into consideration, were the strong lines of trenches running in front of the village of Magny-la-Fosse and the defences of the village of Lehaucourt itself. These were both very strong trench systems which mutually supported each other, though both villages might be outflanked by an advance along the ridge between them.

The advance to the next objective, the first Green line, which was carried out in the same fog as the earlier part of the attack, was, on the left flank, almost without incident, the Brigade meeting with little determined opposition and not having to employ the tanks allotted to it. On the right flank, however, very stout resistance was experienced from strongly-posted enemy detachments on the high ground to the north of Bellenglise. Here, the whole attack was held up by strong artillery fire from

the front, while the attacking troops were galled by heavy machine-gun and rifle fire from the right flank. It was one of those moments when battles are won and lost, but the man capable of dealing with the situation was there to meet the emergency. Lieutenant-Colonel B. W. Vann, M.C., of the 1/6th Sherwood Foresters, seeing that his men were held up and that the barrage was gradually outstripping them, with a corresponding increase of enemy resistance, rushed forward to the firing-line, exposing himself without thought for his own safety. Running from group to group of his men and encouraging them with precept and example, he reorganized and led the whole line forward. By his prompt action and absolute contempt of danger the whole situation was changed, the men were encouraged, and the line once more swept forward, catching up with the barrage and proceeding without further hitch to the Green line. In the final assault on the village of Lehaucourt, this officer again distinguished himself, rushing the team of a field gun which was firing at point-blank range. He shot with his revolver one of the gunners who was on the point of firing and clubbed two others. The success of the day, in fact, was in no small degree due to the splendid gallantry and fine leadership displayed by him.

After passing the first Green objective, the fog commenced to clear considerably, and the whole right flank of the attack was much troubled by the enemy occupying the high ground to the south of the Canal. Machine guns from this direction swept our right flank continuously, and enemy field guns firing over open sights quickly put out of action all five tanks allotted to the 139th Infantry Brigade. This battery was in its turn, however, put out of action by a small party of our men, who, with great gallantry and on their own initiative,



LIEUTENANT-COLONEL B. W. VANN, V.C., M.C., 1/6TH SHERWOODS.
KILLED IN ACTION AT THE BATTLE OF RAMICOURT.

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recrossed the Canal and shot or bayoneted the gunners. Little trouble from infantry was experienced from this direction, though several feeble counter-attacks were made, one mounted German officer making three separate attempts to rally his men and continuing his efforts until well-directed shots killed both himself and his horse, whereupon the men whom he was trying to rally immediately retired.

It would appear that here the enemy lost his great chance to retrieve the fortunes of the day. The 1st Division Artillery put down a heavy smoke barrage on this flank, which was intended as a protection against enemy action as well as cover from observation for our own troops. In the event the barrage did not prove thick enough to afford a screen for our movements, though the fog at first proved an excellent substitute. Certainly it placed an obstacle in the way of a counter-attack, but a well-organized counter-offensive, supported by plenty of reserves and carried through with as much determination as our troops had shown in the attack, might have placed the 46th Division in an awkward position.

The most charitable explanation of the lack of reaction which was so conspicuous a feature of the enemy's fighting during the day is that he was pinned down to his positions by the demonstrations made by the 1st Division, and was afraid to involve any considerable number of troops in case of our attack extending farther to the south.

The ultimate objective of our advance on the right flank of the Division included the village of Lehaucourt, and, in the attack on this village, individual action once more played a conspicuous part. Lieutenant J. N. Wightman, of the 1/6th Sherwoods, having reached his own objective and taken several machine guns, two trench mortars

and two field guns at small cost, led his men forward and pushed right through the village. In spite of opposition he managed to secure the bridge across the Canal, and succeeded in cutting off many prisoners and putting several guns out of action. He then organized his company for defence and retained his hold on the village until the arrival of the support companies, when the whole body moved forward and occupied the line of the final objective.

On the left of the attack the 138th Infantry Brigade, advancing from the first Green line, was faced by the strong trench system in front of the village of Magny-la-Fosse, beyond which was a sunken road strongly organized for defence with numerous machine-gun posts. In the capture of this line the tanks of the Brigade played an important part, cutting broad swathes through the wire entanglements, which here had been very little damaged by our artillery fire. Wheeling after their passage through the wire, the tanks then proceeded northward along the line of the trench and sunken road, enfilading them and giving the crews of the machine guns such a bad time that they fell comparatively easy victims to the Infantry pouring through the gaps in the wire. The tanks, closely followed by the Infantry, then advanced towards the village, and, after a little street fighting, the resistance of the enemy garrison was overcome. At 1.15 p.m. the battalion in question, the 5th Lincolns, reached its objective and reorganized, throwing out a screen of Lewis-gun posts, behind which the line was quickly consolidated. In the meantime, the 5th Leicesters, following the Lincolns, reached Knobkerrie Ridge by 12 noon and halted there, while company commanders, in consultation with the commanders of the tanks attached to them, made their plans for the attack on the final



MAJOR-GENERAL G. F. BOYD, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., D.C.M.,
G.O.C. 46TH DIVISION

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Hyde Park Corner, S.W.

objective. At 12.35 p.m., the battalion halted immediately behind the Dotted Blue line, and at 1.40 p.m., passing through the Lincolns, moved steadily forward to the capture of the second Green line, which was reached about 2 p.m. The work of consolidation was commenced at once, and at 3 p.m. touch was gained with the 139th Infantry Brigade on the right flank.

At 1 p.m. the Divisional Commander rode to the battlefield to congratulate the Brigadiers. The mist by then had completely cleared and the sight was one for which every commander worth the name had lived during the long years of the war.

As far as the eye could see, our troops were pushing forward; batteries were crossing the Canal and coming into action; Engineers everywhere were at work; large bodies of prisoners were coming in from all sides; and the men of the 32nd Division were advancing fast. The enemy were shelling the line of the Canal and Bellenglise, but no one seemed to mind.

It was indeed a break-through.

Thus the battle ended early in the afternoon with the complete attainment of all objectives, and, at 5.30 p.m., the advanced troops of the 32nd Division passed through our front line in pursuit of the retreating enemy.

During the following night, however, the Division was continuously in action, as both flanks were exposed to the enemy. On the morning of the 30th September, the situation was eased through the capture of Thorigny and Talana Hill by the 1st Division, while, during the day, the 2nd Australian Division on our left also moved forward. Towards evening, both Divisions having established touch with the 32nd Division in front of us, the 46th Division was squeezed out of the line, and all three Brigades were withdrawn for a well-earned rest.

The cause of the signal defeat of the enemy in the Battle of Bellenglise was, first and foremost, undoubtedly the fine bearing and splendid determination of the Infantry engaged. Superbly led, the troops at every turn did justice to their leaders. Other conducting causes, however, were the magnificent support given to the assaulting troops by the Artillery, and the opportune fog which completely shrouded all movement from observation by the enemy, nullifying to a great extent the preparations for defence, which were based on the existence of a clear and comparatively open field of fire for his enfilading machine guns.

As regards the work of the Artillery, it is difficult to find words to describe its excellence. To those of us who had the opportunity of subsequently examining the battlefield, the state of the enemy defences after the preparatory work of the heavy guns was a revelation of what heavy artillery could do. The Field Artillery, in spite of the fact that most of the guns were in "silent" positions and had not registered, fired a barrage which was one of the finest under which troops have ever advanced during the war. No cases of short shooting were reported, and the Infantry throughout moved with a confidence which was fully justified. During the action the majority of the batteries moved forward into new positions which had been selected in advance, but, so expeditiously were the moves carried out and so well had they been planned, that they made little appreciable difference to the intensity of the barrage.

The enemy's footing on the west side of the Canal was a feature which might have been invaluable to him had he contemplated offensive action, yet proved in the event to be very largely the cause of his downfall. He was obliged to keep several of his bridges intact in order to

supply and reinforce his men on the west side of the Canal, and it was over these bridges that the main body of the 137th Infantry Brigade eventually poured to the attack of the defences on the east bank.

If he had realized the magnitude of the projected attack and had retired over the Canal in good time, destroying his bridges behind him, there is little doubt that our casualties would have been immensely greater. Indeed, the attack might conceivably have failed, though in view of the satisfactory weather conditions the latter is unlikely.

A feature of the German resistance was the comparatively small amount of artillery retaliation. A strong barrage fell on our old front line after the troops had left it, and the range was shortened in time to cause us considerable casualties before the leading Brigade had crossed the Canal. Such obvious places as Ascension Valley and other depressions behind our line, where concentration might have been expected, were also heavily punished throughout the morning, until the enemy was compelled by our success to remove his guns in order to avoid their capture, and had lost those guns he had failed to remove. The failure of the enemy's artillery to give a good account of itself must also be attributed to the fog. Had observation been possible, fire could have been directed on our marching columns and transport, and the 138th and 139th Infantry Brigades in particular must have suffered heavy casualties while advancing to their forming-up position on the Red line. The same cause probably accounted for the slight use made by the enemy of his heavy artillery. All his firing in the early morning at such targets as Bellenglise Bridge, Bellenglise itself, and La Baraque had to be done by the map. When the fog cleared later in the day, he must have been feeling very doubtful regarding the safety of his guns, and was

no doubt engaged in moving a large proportion of them to positions further back.

It is difficult to estimate how far the fog which played such a decisive part in the winning of the battle was due to natural causes, and how far to the general effect of the bombardment, and in particular to the proportion of smoke shell fired in the barrage. Undoubtedly the latter tended to thicken the fog considerably, but a heavy and persistent mist in the early morning is one of the features of the weather of Northern Europe in the neighbourhood of open water at this particular period of the year. It is likely that the possibility of the occurrence of such a mist had been taken into consideration when plans for the attack were made. In any case, conditions could not have been more favourable.

The enemy had based his defence almost entirely on a cunningly-devised system of machine-gun emplacements arranged to enfilade the Canal and, where possible, the ground west of the Canal. From concrete emplacements approached from behind through winding entrances and with roomy dug-outs beneath them, the "Boche" machine-gunners could sit in comfort with a good store of ammunition, water, and food, and rake the Canal in both directions without the slightest trouble and with very little danger to themselves. Nothing short of a direct hit from a heavy shell would have made an impression on many of these small forts—for they were nothing else—and, theoretically, in clear weather, the passage of the Canal should have been pretty well an impossibility. Nothing is more significant, therefore, than the fact that as one strolls along the banks of the St. Quentin Canal one can see emplacement after emplacement, immensely strong, well-sited and undamaged by our artillery fire. Yet the occupants of these

fortresses have long ago gone either to swell the death-roll of Germany, or to add to the number of German prisoners who are working behind our lines.

The extraordinary features of the defensive scheme on our immediate front and on our left flank were undoubtedly the Bellenglise and Bellicourt Tunnels. The latter was simply a cunningly-adapted tunnel of civilian origin, where the Canal for some three miles passes through a subterranean cutting. The only local interest this tunnel held was due to the reported discovery within it of a series of cauldrons, one of which contained a dead German, and which were said to be the outward and visible sign of the presence of a plant for rendering down the bodies of German soldiers—a “Kadaver-verwendungsanstalt” in fact. A close examination of the cauldrons, however, shows nothing to uphold this view, and it is much more likely—indeed practically certain—that the cauldrons were used for disinfecting soldiers’ clothes or some equally legitimate purpose.

Far more interesting from a military point of view is the Bellenglise Tunnel, which is probably the best existing monument of that painstaking thoroughness which is the chief racial characteristic of the “Boche.” This huge artificial dug-out, the spoil-heap of which has half buried the village of Bellenglise, and which must have taken many months of effort and endless labour to complete, is an excellent example of the futility of a great part of the human effort the sum of which goes to make up modern war. The pride of the German Engineers’ hearts, it was destined to serve merely as a shelter for several hundred demoralized soldiers, who remained safely ensconced within it until, on the arrival of a small party of our men, they delivered themselves up, glad to be finished with the war.

Both of these tunnels were capable of housing several thousands of men, and were absolutely safe assembly-places where the enemy could laugh at the worst efforts of our artillery. For offensive operations they would have been invaluable reservoirs, but for the defence of the Canal they were too close to the front line to be ideal. The fog and the indomitable perseverance with which our men kept up with the barrage and so prevented the egress of these reserves, caused the Bellenglise Tunnel to become simply a means of swelling the tale of prisoners captured by our leading Brigade. Thus was the work of two years neutralized and more than neutralized in three or four hours. By the next day the victors themselves were snugly housed in the tunnel, lighted brilliantly by a Boche electric plant tended by Boche electricians, safe from the raids of German aeroplanes, and doubly safe from the shells from the German heavy guns which were at that time again making Bellenglise and La Baraque their principal targets.

Four thousand two hundred prisoners and seventy guns, at a cost of rather under 800 casualties—such was the record the 46th Division had to its credit on the night of the 29th September. The effect on the *moral* of the enemy was to be displayed in the days that were to come. Never again would his Infantry fight confident in the idea that, if the worst happened, they had behind them an impregnable line on which to fall back and re-organize. They knew—and we knew—that, whatever the German papers might say, there could be no line to come like the Hindenburg Line, which had taken two years to make and on which all the resources of German military engineering and an immense amount of money and labour had been expended.

The breaking of the Hindenburg Line marked a definite

stage in the history of the war, for it opened the way to a war of movement which could only end in one way. The 46th Division had done its share. Next day we were to learn that, simultaneously, the line had been broken along the whole front on which it had been attacked by the First, Third, and Fourth British Armies; with it was broken the backbone of German resistance and the faith of the German people in the power of the German Army. In this connection a quotation from the column "Through German Eyes" in *The Times* of December 11th is significant, and emphasizes, as nothing else has done, the importance of the action in which the 46th Division played a conspicuous part. There Professor Hans Delbrück—a German of the Germans—writes:—

"The turn in our fortunes began with the collapse of our attack on Rheims and the successful advance of the French north of the Marne. According to certain observations which had been communicated to me, Ludendorff had then already become very uncertain at heart. Nevertheless he and Herr von Hintze during the next nine weeks did nothing to ease our position politically—until on *September the 29th* Ludendorff collapsed and completed our defeat by the offer of an armistice."

The 46th Division, in spite of many changes since it had arrived in France in 1915, was still essentially a "Territorial" Division in the fullest and greatest sense of the word. Nothing could exceed the wave of feeling and pride which swept across the North Midland Counties on the receipt of news of this—one of the greatest achievements of the war—for which their own Division was responsible.

Dozens of congratulatory messages were received from individuals and from institutions personally interested in the exploit of the men of their own counties, who were engaged in making history and in creating traditions to uplift the hearts of those who should come after them, while setting a standard for future "Territorials" to strive to equal. Such messages, republished in Divisional Orders and read by all the troops, could not fail to intensify an ardour and raise a *moral*, already well above the average. Perhaps the message which most touched the hearts and steeled the nerves of men who not so long ago themselves had thronged the playing-grounds and class-rooms of Midland schools, was one from the Mayor of Buxton, worthy of record in its intimate appeal:—

"Two thousand boys and girls from Buxton schools, Derbyshire, assembled in the Market Place to-day and saluted the Union Jack in honour of the glorious deeds of the 46th Division. They thank you for all you have done for them, send their love, and pray God to bless you all."

PART II

THE BATTLE OF RAMICOURT

CHAPTER IV

THE VICTORY AT RAMICOURT

IF Bellenglise is the name which is destined to be forever remembered by all ranks of the 46th Division in connection with the most dramatic of the victories which was placed to their credit during the glorious autumn of 1918, still the Battle of Ramicourt, fought and won on the 3rd October, will take its place in the annals of the Division as the action in which, beyond all others, superior numbers of the enemy were thoroughly beaten in stout, straightforward fighting, on the part of the rank and file of the Infantry, inspired by the gallant leading of their officers.

On this occasion there was no such providential fog as that to which in great measure was due the successful breaching of the Hindenburg Line at its strongest point. At Ramicourt the 46th Division met, on more equal terms, and defeated in a pitched battle by stark and straight fighting, the 241st, 221st, 119th, and 34th Divisions of the German Army. True, some of these Divisions had lately been withdrawn from other fronts and were still worn out with their previous great ordeal, but the 241st and 34th, at least, were fresh troops, and, after all, the 46th Division also had just passed through

the strain of a most tremendous effort and, though flushed with well-merited success, the troops were to a certain extent jaded by their previous efforts.

The Battles of Bellenglise and Ramicourt may be contrasted in a single sentence: Bellenglise was a miracle; Ramicourt was a victory: therein lies the essential difference between them.

At 5.30 p.m. on the 30th September the 32nd Division passed through the 46th Division, who were resting on their final objective beyond Magny and Lehaucourt, and advanced, closely supported by British Cavalry, to what it was trusted would be the last fight the Germans should make in prepared positions this side of the Sambre-Oise Canal. The Division, however, met with more opposition than was expected, and was finally held up on the general line running between Sequehart (exclusive) and Joncourt (inclusive), while in front of them the enemy held the Beaurevoir-Fonsomme line, a partially completed but strongly wired system of trenches. He had also strong forces in Sequehart and strong posts thrown out everywhere in front of his main line of resistance right across the front of the Division. On the left and right the Australians and 1st Division were also held, and the waiting Cavalry were forced to return west of the Canal and give up the attempt to break through for the present.

It was quite clear that, if the original plan of a breakthrough on a large scale was to be carried out, a further attack would be necessary in order to overrun this last organized defensive position, which, though much less strong than the Hindenburg Line itself, was an insuperable obstacle to Cavalry, and, bravely defended by stout troops, was likely to give Infantry also a good deal of trouble.

At a Corps Conference held in the afternoon of the 2nd

October, the G.O.C. 46th Division was instructed to attack and capture the line Sequehart (exclusive)—Montbrehain, getting into touch with the 2nd Australian Division to the north-west of the latter village. At the same time the 32nd Division, side-slipping to the right, was to attack and capture Sequehart, thus protecting our right flank.

Readers of this account will remember that the conclusion of the Battle of Bellenglise, on the night of the 29th September, found the 46th Division relieved of pressure on their front by the 32nd Division, but with both flanks unprotected. Owing to the exposure of its flanks the Division remained in action throughout the night, and it was not until the early hours of the morning that our right flank was cleared by the occupation of Talana Hill and Thorigny by the 1st Division. Still later the 2nd Australian Division overcame the resistance of the troops opposed to them, and, advancing through Etricourt, joined up with the 32nd Division well to our left front. This squeezed the 46th Division out of the line altogether, Divisional Headquarters remaining at Small Post Wood, while the Infantry Brigades concentrated, the 138th Brigade to the west of the Canal, the 137th Brigade on the eastern bank of the Canal, with Headquarters and one battalion in the Bellenglise Tunnel, and the 139th Brigade also east of the Canal with Headquarters in a dug-out in the Canal bank. The latter Brigade acted as Divisional Reserve to the 32nd Division and was placed temporarily under the orders of the G.O.C. of that Division. Of the Artillery, five Brigades—the 16th Army Brigade R.H.A., the 14th Army Brigade R.F.A., the 23rd Army Brigade R.F.A., the 161st Army Brigade R.H.A., and the 118th Army Brigade R.F.A.—remained in action covering the

advance of the 32nd Division, while the remaining four—the 5th Army Brigade R.F.A., the 231st and 230th Brigades R.F.A., and the 232nd Army Brigade R.F.A.—withdrew out of action and were placed in reserve to the west of the Canal.

The Signal Company meanwhile received instructions to establish a Forward Report Centre at La Baraque, on the site of what had formerly been a small farm at the cross-roads 500 yards north-east of Bellenglise. Here were a number of deep dug-outs and one or two strong cement shelters which had formerly been the Headquarters of one of the German formations holding the main Hindenburg Line east of the Canal. This Report Centre with the necessary signal office and local telephone lines to "G," "Q," and other essential offices sited in the neighbouring dug-outs, was completed during the 1st and 2nd October, and communication successfully established with Corps Headquarters; with all three Infantry Brigades in their reserve positions; and with 32nd Division Advanced Report Centre in a dug-out a few yards distant from the new signal office. At the same time three cable detachments were ordered up to La Baraque, ready for a move forward in the event of a break-through, while all the cable which could be got forward in the time was also collected here.

All possible preparations were thus completed to meet any situation which might arise, either in the event of the Division being required to pass through the 32nd Division on a route march through the enemy country, or to reinforce in the event of the battle going against our troops. Subsequent events were to demonstrate that this prevision was to have a decisive bearing on the readiness of the Division to fight the battle, the plans for which

were already being conceived in the mind of the Higher Command.

At 4.30 p.m., as already stated, the Corps Commander issued orders personally at a Corps Conference to the General Officers commanding the Divisions concerned. These orders had to be considered by the Divisional Staffs and detailed instructions issued to the G.O's.C., Infantry Brigades, and the O's.C. Artillery Groups, before any movements of formations, which were much scattered, could be arranged. The attack was scheduled to commence at 6.5 a.m. the following morning, so it was clear from the beginning that no time must be lost either in formulating plans, or in carrying them out when once devised, while any hitch in the proceedings, however small, was likely to be disastrous. The scope of the operations was such as to demand every atom of the strength of the Division, applied at the right time in exactly the right place in order to achieve success. Ramicourt was, in fact, to be that type of operation most dangerous unless carried out under the orders of an extremely efficient Staff by competent subordinates—an impromptu battle. If to this is added the fact that practically all preparation and movement had to be carried out by night—and a moonless night too, as so happened—and that the situation on the front held by the 32nd Division was by no means clear, even to the Staff of that Division, it will be seen that there was every chance of the attack going wrong from the start should any one senior officer prove unequal to the task allotted him.

The country about the St. Quentin Canal had formed a slight interruption to the rolling downs to the westward, but here once again the landscape assumed the same characteristics. As far as eye could see from the tops

of the low rounded ridges near the Canal there was no change. Everywhere were the same gently undulating features with occasional woods or copses, the whole seamed by the sunken roads which throughout were one of the salient characteristics of the country over which the Division had fought. These sunken roads, owing to the shelter and security from observation afforded by them and the facility with which they could be organized for defence, were of the greatest importance from the military point of view. It was along such roads as ran approximately north and south that the enemy, after having been pushed out of his last prepared line, put up his most stubborn defence while being pressed back over this open country. Other features of the country which had a certain effect on military dispositions were the little scarps which existed along the edges of most of the valleys in the district. At these points, where the ground rises to form the flat-contoured hills, the earth had usually been cut away to form a little cliff anything from two to six or even more feet in height ; the resultant scarp, when facing in the right direction with regard to the enemy, affording shelter from observation. These faces were usually of soft earth, chalk, or crumbly sandstone, and were used to a great extent by both combatants, who burrowed into them and so obtained a certain measure of security from shell fire at the cost of a minimum amount of labour. The shelter thus afforded from the weather conditions was also not to be despised as the autumn crept on, the nights grew longer, and the temperature fell lower. Many hundreds of men of the 46th Division will in future days look back with pleasure to the nights spent in these little, not uncomfortable, bivouacs after a hard day's work either fighting or chasing the "Boche."

Indeed, it may not be far from true that the best days of many lives will be those of the autumn of 1918, when to be alive and well was a thing to be grateful for, and when the British Army was at last obtaining a just reward for all its dogged and patient fighting.

Little was known of the country over which the coming battle was to be fought, but, from aeroplane observation and prisoners' statements, it had been possible to plot on our maps the system of defence known as the Beaurevoir-Fonsomme line where the enemy had turned at bay, and which the 46th Division was now asked to breach. On the map, this line appears as a continuous double line of trenches heavily protected by two strong barbed-wire entanglements. It was apparently stronger at the western than at the eastern end of the objective of the Division, where, however, it was supported by the organized defences of the village of Sequehart and was overlooked and enfiladed by the machine guns and artillery on the high ground to the east. Actually a close examination of the line after its capture by our troops alters the values of the photographic representation considerably. Aeroplane photographs will show a line of trenches well and will betray the chief strong-points, but the details of a carefully-prepared system such as the one under present consideration are not so easily seen. The Beaurevoir-Fonsomme line was both stronger and weaker than it appeared.

The unexpected strength of the line lay in two principal things. The first was the stout heart of the garrison which held it, properly imbued, as the men were, with a sense of its importance as the last of the German outlying lines of defence. The second source of strength was the presence at fifty-yard intervals of strong, well-constructed concrete shelters, where machine-gun crews

could obtain immunity from our barrage, to reappear immediately it had passed and mow down our attacking Infantry if they lagged behind it. Never had it been more important for the success of our attack that the Infantry should keep up with the guns if casualties and perhaps repulse were to be avoided.

The weakness of the line, on the other hand, consisted in the fact that its construction had never been completed. Our success on the 29th September had been so wholly unexpected that work on the Fonsomme line had been restricted to the building of the concrete strong-points, the wiring of entanglements, and the tracing-out of the lines of trenches to a spade-depth only. "Surely"—the German Higher Command must have reflected—"the British cannot take the Hindenburg Line in their stride. They will attack, as on the Somme, after weeks of preliminary bombardment, and in the meantime we shall have plenty of time to complete the preparation of further lines behind."

On the contrary, the whirlwind attack on the Canal proved irresistible and the assault on the Fonsomme line found the enemy to a certain extent unprepared, though the line as it was, with rifle pits three or four feet deep dug by individual defenders, was a sufficiently formidable obstacle to render the success of an attack doubtful. One feature of the Fonsomme line as it appears at present is the small extent to which it has been damaged by artillery. Near the Canal the defences had been smashed into chaos by our heavy artillery, so that in places it was difficult to distinguish the original plan on which they were built. The Fonsomme line is, however, practically undamaged: there is not one single concrete emplacement on the whole of the Divisional front which has been damaged by artillery fire, while the

trenches themselves are nearly free from direct hits. There was, in fact, very little preliminary artillery preparation for the Ramicourt Battle; what little work the "heavies" did carry out being confined chiefly to the villages and such dominant features as Doon Hill and Copse, where enemy artillery was active during the later stages of the battle.

Besides the Beaurevoir-Fonsomme line, the main obstacles to be overcome in the area scheduled for attack by the 46th Division were the villages of Ramicourt and Montbrehain, lesser obstacles being the networks of sunken roads lying around Neville's Cross and Ramicourt Station, together with the Beaurevoir-Montbrehain railway-line which ran transversely across the Divisional front, forming a strong convex outer defence line to Montbrehain.

The country between these strong-points was, as already stated, open and undulating, but it was unfortunate that the dominating features—hills slightly above the average in height—were on the extreme right flank of the Divisional objective. These ridges, Mannequin Hill and Doon Hill, were to play a decisive part in the enemy's resistance, particularly in assisting his strong counter-attacks towards the end of the day. Both from Mannequin Hill and Doon Hill, artillery and machine guns could fire with direct observation on the greater part of the country attacked, so that the guns on these hills caused considerable casualties long after the Infantry resistance had been overcome. Our troops were thus forced, for the sake of shelter, to take up positions with inferior opportunities for observation, and the enemy in his counter-attacks was able to infiltrate into our positions from one direction and another without much opposition. Towards the end of the day, the

position had become very obscure indeed, and had to be cleared up, on one portion of our front at any rate, by a retreat to positions well behind those held by us at the conclusion of the morning's attack.

When the orders for attack were received from the IX Corps, the situation on the front held by the 32nd Division was anything but clear, and reliable information could not be obtained as to the exact position of our own front-line troops and those of the enemy. It was decided, therefore, to attack from a line some distance behind our reported front line, in order to make certain that the forming-up of our troops should not be interfered with by contact with enemy patrols. The selection of a forming-up line which could be located and on which the troops could be disposed in the darkness of the early morning might have been a matter of extreme difficulty. The problem was in this instance solved, however, by the presence of the Joncourt-Sequehart Road, a well-marked feature running parallel to the whole front of attack and, providentially, only a few hundred yards in front of the line held by the enemy. Guides from all units were therefore selected, shown the road and the approaches to it, and sent back to lead their units to their appointed places on this line. The actual forming-up line was taped out some 200 yards in front of this road and approximately parallel to it.

To allow latitude for any possible short shooting or incorrect disposition of the attacking troops, the initial barrage line was laid down some 200 yards in advance of the forming-up line. Here it was to wait six minutes before lifting, in order to permit the Infantry to redistribute themselves under its shelter before moving forward against the first objective.

Perhaps the arm most affected by the shortness of

notice before the attack was the Artillery. The C.R.A. 46th Division had under his command nine Brigades of Horse and Field Artillery, and with this force he was ordered to cover the front of attack of both the 46th and 32nd Divisions. Of these Brigades, five were already in position, and the fire from these five was arranged so as to cover the whole front of the attack, the fire from the remaining four, which had to move forward, being superimposed upon the barrage laid down by the former.

Thus, in the event of the failure of these other Brigades to come into action in time, a failure which had to be reckoned with and which might, under adverse circumstances, have been unavoidable, there would be no gaps in the barrage, and the troops, though insufficiently supported, could have advanced to time with a fair prospect of success.

Instructions were at once sent out to all Brigade Commanders to reconnoitre positions well east of the Canal within 2,000 yards of the front line, and to make the necessary arrangements to get their batteries in line and their ammunition dumped ready to open fire on the initial barrage line at zero hour if possible, or as soon afterwards as they could manage.

In this connection it may be interesting to the civilian reader to have some account of the special difficulties of the Artillery under circumstances such as those we are considering. To deal with a particular case, the officer commanding any one of the nine Artillery groups covering the Division in the Battle of Ramicourt received his orders about one hour before dark. His preparations had to be completed and his batteries ready for action by 6.5 a.m. the following day. Positions must be reconnoitred, horses must be brought up from the wagon lines, guns must be got into posi-

tion, telephone lines must be laid from Brigade Headquarters to batteries, barrage tables must be prepared, and ammunition brought up and dumped handy to the guns.

The group commander, taking his battery commanders with him, proceeds direct to the area allotted to him, and arrives with half an hour of daylight remaining in which to choose his headquarters and the battery positions.

Battery positions must of course be chosen so that they are not under direct observation of the enemy. Precautions must also be taken to ensure that the guns can clear the crest in front of them and have a clear line of fire to engage the targets assigned to them.

The exact positions of the enemy are not known with any certainty. A moment's thought will suffice to show that the difficulties of choosing in such short time suitable positions for four batteries, in unknown country, with the situation obscure and the light failing, are all but insuperable. When, in spite of circumstances, battery positions have been selected and a Brigade Headquarters chosen, officers are sent back to bring the guns into position.

The officers sent back have had little chance of studying the country, and it is by now a pitch-black night. The roads are crowded with traffic, tracks are deep in mud and broken-up every few yards by deep shell-craters. Every yard of the way there is imminent danger of gun or wagon falling headlong into a hole from which it would take hours to retrieve them. When the positions are finally reached, the guns must be manœuvred over shell-torn ground into the precise sites selected for them.

Meanwhile, the Brigade Staff, sitting in a hole in a

bank, must get out their orders, and the battery commanders sitting in shell-holes must work out, by fitful candle-light, their barrage tables. A telephone exchange must be established at Brigade Headquarters and some miles of telephone lines laid to batteries.

All this must take place in absolute darkness, working every minute against time, while the enemy is scattering gas shells over the whole area. It needs little imagination, therefore, to realize the immense difficulties and the thousand chances that fate may oppose to the achievement of the result aimed at.

The fact that good positions were selected and all Brigades, except the 232nd Army Field Artillery Brigade, were able to open fire up to time reflects the greatest credit on the energy and good leadership of the commanding officers, and on the zeal with which their orders were carried out by all subordinate officers and by the rank and file of the Brigades.

The Brigade above mentioned was at a considerable distance from Divisional Headquarters and was not at the time in communication with the latter by telephone. Orders did not, therefore, reach its commander until very late, and at zero hour this Brigade was still moving, though it came into action shortly afterwards.

The barrage to be fired by the Field Artillery was naturally of a somewhat impromptu nature, as no time was available for the issue of elaborate time-tables and barrage maps. Everything possible was done, however, to ensure accurate firing, and the precaution referred to above, that of throwing the initial barrage some distance in front of the Infantry, enabled the latter to conform to any slight irregularities. The reports of all ranks who advanced under it, indeed, show that, though there was slightly more short shooting than usual, the barrage as

a whole was regular and adequate, so that the Infantry were able to advance behind it with confidence.

The rôle of the Heavy Artillery during the present battle was a very subordinate one when compared with the part played by it in the attack on Bellenglise. Good work was, however, done, both by the 6-inch howitzers which fired in front of the barrage, and by the 60-pounders and heavier guns which bombarded Sequehart, Ramicourt, and Montbrehain, together with the main approaches to, and commanding features in, the area attacked.

The problem of signal communications in such a battle as that projected was no small one. Very fortunately, the establishment of an Advanced Report Centre at La Baraque provided the skeleton of a system, the details of which might be, and were, filled in at short notice under difficult circumstances. The O.C. R.A. Signals was faced with the problem of discovering from Brigade commanders the positions which they were selecting for their new Headquarters, and anticipating their requirements by connecting these Headquarters by telephone with Advanced Division. This had to be done for nine Brigades, and, in most cases, the lines to be laid were two or three miles in length. It was fortunate, indeed, that five of these Brigades were already connected to the 32nd Divisional Report Centre at La Baraque itself, so that a short strip of poled cable 200 or 300 yards in length was sufficient to connect the two arteries together and to assure temporary communication with the greater part of the Artillery. For the rest, cable detachments worked all night despite darkness and a sporadic bombardment by gas shells which was responsible for several slight casualties. On more than one occasion lines were cut as they were being laid and, in particular, the village of Joncourt proved so unpleasant that the route to the

Divisional Observation Officer had finally to avoid that place. Both horses and men of the cable detachment had worked all the previous day and, during the preparations for the Battle of Bellenglise, had had a gruelling time. Nothing daunted, however, by previous work or present danger, all ranks persevered, and by morning, when six o'clock brought us to within five minutes of zero hour, the last line—that to the Australian Division on our left flank—was through, and both Flank Divisions, all the Infantry Brigades (both front and rear Headquarters), and eight Artillery Brigades were in touch with Divisional Headquarters by telephone. When the Divisional Commander and C.R.A. arrived and the battle began, they were able to control the whole situation from a central point, where they could each consult the other as Artillery support was needed or Infantry dispositions were changed. Good communication is essential in modern warfare where the opposing armies are far-flung over many miles of country, and at Ramicourt, under circumstances as adverse as they well could be, the 46th Signal Company justified itself to the last man. Day broke and showed a strong and easily-maintained cable network, with both telegraph and telephone communication to all Headquarters, this being duplicated by complete visual and wireless systems which, however, were not used to any great extent because the lines held up so well.

Cavalry, Engineers, and Artillery, all play their essential parts in modern war, and, to understand the battle, a discussion of the necessary preparations which make in so great measure for success or failure is essential. Yet, when once the description of the battle itself is reached, it is the Infantry (the P.B.I. as they delight to call themselves) who must perforce—and of right—take up the

greater proportion of our interest and attention. Battles can be won—true, at tremendous cost—with little or no artillery preparation, and with little or no assistance from Cavalry or Engineers. This was proved for ever in the early days of the war on the Eastern front, where the masses of ill-armed and ill-equipped Russian soldiery were driven to their death, yes, and to victory, against the best-equipped army in Europe. Without Infantry, on the other hand, no amount of artillery or other preparation can lead to any capture of territory, or to the destruction of an opposing army. So, at Ramicourt, while the Artillery and Signals played an important part in the victory, it is to the Infantry we must turn to find the driving-force which out-fought the German Divisions opposed to us and registered another victory on the already long list to the credit of the British Armies.

The march of the Infantry to the forming-up positions was carried out in the pitch blackness of a very dark night and over unfamiliar country. Despite this, however, no hesitation or trouble occurred, and the forming-up line was reached in good time. By this time, the first glimmer of dawn made it possible for officers to locate their positions and forming-up was carried out without difficulty by means of the taped line, or on compass bearings, all front-line battalions deploying on the agreed positions 200 yards behind the barrage line. Enemy artillery was normally active during this period, paying particular attention to Lehaucourt Valley, and, while waiting for the barrage to open, the 1/6th South Staffords were unfortunate enough to lose an officer and six men by a direct hit from a shell.

The Infantry of the Division were attacking on a two-Brigade front with the 139th Infantry Brigade on the left and the 137th Infantry Brigade on the right, the

138th Infantry Brigade being in Divisional Reserve round about Magny-la-Fosse and the St. Quentin Canal. Attached to the latter Brigade were the 1/1st Monmouths, who were ordered to concentrate in and about Springbok Valley.

Dawn broke with a heavy fog as on the day of the Bellenglise Battle, but on this occasion the mist thinned rapidly, and when the barrage opened and the men sprang forward at 6.5 a.m., the fog was clearing with every prospect of a fine day to follow. Flushed with their previous success, officers and men leaped to their feet and thrust forward to conform to the barrage, which stood before them, a thundering wall of smoke and pulverized earth, interposing between them and the enemy a friendly, if highly dangerous, veil of invisibility. Before them, for six long minutes, the line of bursting shells stood still, then, with the Infantry behind it, commenced to move steadily forward, and the conquest of the last German main line of resistance was begun.

Behind the Infantry rumbled the tanks, of which one company was again attached to each fighting Brigade, and whose duties were the destruction of the barbed-wire entanglements which formed the chief physical obstacle in the path of our advance.

The tasks of the two Brigades in the front line were essentially different. The Left Brigade (139th Infantry Brigade) had a straightforward if difficult task allotted to it—the task of advancing against the Fonsomme line at its strongest point and then overrunning and mopping up in succession the villages of Ramicourt and Montbrehain. From the first, the attack met with strong resistance, the German troops in the Fonsomme line putting up a very stout fight indeed. There had been no preliminary bombardment, and paths through the wire had to be

ploughed by the tanks. The Infantry, pouring through these gaps, or making their way independently through the wire belts, then rushed the trenches with the bayonet, carrying all before them, and utterly destroying the garrison, who, to do them justice, made no attempt to escape their fate by flight. It is estimated that practically the whole garrison of this line was wiped out, between 150 and 200 German bodies being found after the battle in the trenches on the front attacked by the 139th Brigade alone. Immediately in rear of the Fonsomme line, more stiff fighting was experienced. Here enemy machine-gun sections were dug in in isolated gun-pits which were very difficult indeed to deal with.

It was in the attack on such posts that Sergeant W. H. Johnson of the 1/5th Sherwoods well earned the Victoria Cross which was later bestowed upon him. This N.C.O., when his platoon was held up by such a nest of enemy machine guns, worked his way forward single-handed under very heavy rifle and machine-gun fire and charged the post, bayoneting several gunners, and capturing the two machine guns which had been delaying the advance. During the attack, he was severely wounded by a bomb, but nevertheless continued to lead his men forward until, a similar situation occurring, he again rushed forward alone and attacked the post. This time, taking a leaf out of the enemy's book, he made his attack with bombs and, putting both guns out of action, captured the crews, thus again enabling the troops to advance and preventing them from falling dangerously far behind the barrage.

Having cleared the Beaurevoir-Fonsomme line with comparatively few casualties to themselves, the Sherwoods then advanced on the village of Ramicourt, where, however, the two leading battalions—the 5th and 8th Sherwood Foresters—apparently lost direction slightly,



SERGEANT W. H. JOHNSON, V.C., 1/5TH SHERWOODS. THE HERO
OF THE ATTACK ON THE BEAUREVOIR-FONSOMME LINE

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spreading out through the northern and southern outskirts of the village. Observing this, the O.C. 6th Sherwood Foresters, who was in reserve, acted on his own initiative and pushed his reserve company and Battalion Headquarters through the village, and commenced to mop it up. In this task, he was later assisted by the support companies of the leading battalions. The troops in Ramicourt, however, in contrast with those encountered in the line before the village, put up comparatively little resistance, having been probably demoralized by the attention paid to the village and its surroundings by our heavy artillery. The village yielded in all some 400 prisoners. Shortly after crossing the Fonsomme line, however, during the clearing of the outlying machine-gun posts, the attacking battalions suffered severe losses, and amongst those who fell were two battalion commanders—Lieutenant-Colonel B. W. Vann, V.C., M.C., of the 1/6th Sherwoods, killed, and Lieutenant-Colonel A. Hacking, M.C., wounded. The latter, however, remained with his men until the situation had been cleared up and the attack had passed well east of Ramicourt. Mention has already been made of the extraordinary bravery and initiative shown by Colonel Vann at the Battle of Bellenglise, bravery which has since been recognized by the award of a posthumous Victoria Cross, the highest honour that can be bestowed upon a soldier, and the greatest mark of respect that can be paid to his memory should he have fallen in the execution of his duty. This officer, during the Battle of Ramicourt, showed the same fine spirit as in the previous action, and his death, while leading his men forward among the enemy machine-gun posts beyond the Fonsomme line, was a loss which was felt throughout the Division in less degree only than in the battalion he had led so well.

About this period of the action, it became evident that the Division on the left of the 46th Division was not making progress according to time-table, so, in order to protect the left flank of the Brigade, the O.C. 8th Sherwood Foresters was directed to despatch two companies through Wiancourt to form a defensive flank. This was done and a few prisoners taken. Thus, with its flank secure, the Brigade was once more in a position to move forward against the strong bodies of the enemy who had taken up their position in the sunken roads and in the railway-cutting at Ramicourt Station, and who were likely to delay the advance considerably, unless the Infantry fell upon them while their resistance was smothered by our barrage.

At about this period of the advance, the troops also came under enfilade fire from high ground to the north-west of Montbrehain and slightly to the left front of the final objective assigned to the Division. In order to avoid this galling fire, hedges and sunken roads had to be resorted to, and the advance in consequence now lost its ordered nature, the men dribbling forward as occasion served and taking advantage of every possible bit of shelter.

During the advance to Ramicourt, the tanks allotted to the Brigade played a subordinate part, but they were very useful in clearing out isolated machine-gun nests and, especially, in mopping-up the western outskirts of Ramicourt, where, however, all but one were knocked out. The remaining tank advanced with the Infantry until immediately south of Montbrehain, when, just before reaching the first objective, it advanced single-handed against a nest of no less than sixteen machine guns, killing the whole of the crews of these guns, but being itself disabled during the fight. From this stage, the Infantry advanced without further help from tanks.

In spite of strong resistance and fairly heavy casualties, the sunken roads at Ramicourt Station were cleared of the enemy without our men falling behind the barrage, and, eventually, the whole line formed up on the first objective, a line running north-west and south-east through the southern outskirts of Montbrehain. Here, the barrage halted for twenty minutes, and, while the fighting troops were reorganized, success signals were fired, and news sent back to Divisional Headquarters of the good progress made by the attack. On receipt of this news, the supporting troops under the command of the G.O.C. 138th Infantry Brigade were ordered to occupy the Beaurevoir-Fonsomme line. At the same time, the C.R.A. 46th Division ordered two batteries from each group to move forward into the area west of Ramicourt ready to support any further advance or to assist the Infantry to repulse any counter-attack which might be launched after they had reached their final objective. Meanwhile, the absence of any support on our left flank had entailed the north-eastward extension of the defensive flank already pushed out in the direction of Wiancourt. The greater part of the 8th Battalion of Sherwood Foresters was therefore now fully engaged in protecting this flank, and the driving-power of the Brigade was by so much reduced.

During the attack, as in the attack on Bellenglise, and subsequent attacks in the more open warfare which was to follow, the trench mortar batteries attached to each Brigade, an arm of the Service which (as its name suggests) was developed during trench warfare, had proved of great use, but were handicapped by their comparative immobility. Sometimes, it was even found advisable to use the personnel of the sections as riflemen, and good value from the men was undoubtedly obtained in this way. There were many occasions, however, when the guns did

excellent work, either in dealing with unusually stubborn machine-gun nests, or in the protection of an exposed flank by overhead fire, and, throughout this and other actions, all officers, N.C.O.s, and men of these batteries behaved superbly, whether employed as Infantry or Artillery. In the attack on Ramicourt, especially, one officer of the 139th Trench Mortar Battery—Second-Lieutenant H. Edgson of the 1/5th Sherwood Foresters—greatly distinguished himself. Being determined that his mortars should play as important a part as possible in the battle, he showed the greatest perseverance and gallantry, taking his section of guns up through the heavy enemy barrage, and succeeding on three occasions in bringing them into action against the retiring enemy, causing many casualties amongst them. Later on, when unable to keep pace with the advance, he found a company of Infantry whose officers had all become casualties, so, taking command, he reorganized the company and led it forward. During the subsequent advance, losing no chance of turning his technical knowledge to advantage, he showed marked initiative, twice turning a hostile trench mortar on the enemy—on one occasion, destroying an enemy machine-gun nest and, on another, dispersing a party of enemy who were collecting for a local counter-attack.

The attack from the first objective was resumed by the 6th Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters immediately the protective barrage lifted, and, at the start, the fresh attack met with strong enemy resistance, heavy street fighting taking place in Montbrehain, particularly in the area about the cemetery which had been strongly organized for defence. This latter place was finally rushed and cleared by a series of locally-organized small attacks, but it proved impossible to consolidate and hold

the position owing to the heavy machine-gun fire from the high ground to the north which was strongly held by the enemy. The village itself also was held in force and proved very difficult to clear, much sniping and machine-gun fire being encountered. Officer casualties in particular were very heavy during the street fighting at this period of the battle. For some time the battalion was, indeed, held up altogether, and the situation was not made any more easy by the presence of civilians. Of these, some seventy were found in Ramicourt and Montbrehain, some of whom rushed out to give our men greeting, as they passed to take their share in turning out the German garrison.

The attack on the village of Montbrehain was carried out under the command of Major J. A. Shedden, M.C., who had taken command of the 1/6th Sherwood Foresters after Colonel Vann had been killed in action, and it was to his personal example that the success of the attack was very largely due, as it was on his battalion, up to the present, the brunt of the fighting had fallen. Now, however, the 5th and 8th Battalions, having achieved their objectives and completed the formation of a defensive flank, sent companies inward to assist in the mopping-up of the village. The enemy then, imagining himself to be outnumbered, lost heart and surrendered freely, with the result that in a short time the whole of the village was in our hands, with over 1,000 prisoners in addition.

One of the principal features of the enemy's defence, and one which gave our troops most trouble to overcome, was a battery of field guns snugly ensconced just to the eastward of the northern outskirts of the village. These were successfully dealt with by a company of the 1/5th Sherwoods, who, under the

gallant leading of Lieutenant J. W. Potter, overcame all opposition and rushed the teams, bayoneting or shooting those of the gunners who did not either take to flight or surrender, and capturing all six guns. This officer then endeavoured to lead his company eastward against heavy machine-gun fire and two batteries of field guns firing over open sights, but was unable to make progress against the overwhelming opposition encountered, and was finally obliged to dig in and consolidate his position in the eastern outskirts of the village.

The mopping-up of the village of Montbrehain was completed by 11.30 a.m., and our troops, by that time, rested practically on the objectives assigned to them in the plans for the attack. Attempts were then made to push out platoon posts to the high ground on the north, east, and south-east of the village. The strength of the Brigade had, however, been seriously depleted during the advance, and the enemy were in great strength and well supported by artillery, so that all attempts to debouch from the village proved abortive. Another thing which had, of course, led to great dispersion of strength which otherwise might have sufficed to establish our hold on the high ground beyond the village, was the insecurity of both flanks and the consequent necessity of providing troops to make them safe. The most advanced post of the Australians lay due east of the village of Wiancourt, so that the front held by the troops of the 139th Brigade was twice the length originally intended. On the left also, although the Sherwoods were on the inter-brigade boundary, contact could not be established with the Stafford Brigade, and parties pushed out to gain touch had been, up to this time, unsuccessful. The Staffords, owing to similar trouble with their right flank, had side-slipped considerably, and

the reserve troops pushed in to fill the gap had not yet reached their forward positions.

Thus, twelve noon found our Left Brigade somewhat precariously established on their final objective, and, before proceeding to follow their fortunes further, it is necessary to turn and consider what had happened in the meantime to the 137th Infantry Brigade, which was entrusted with the attack on the right of our front.

While the attack of the 139th Brigade was a straightforward assault on a frontage of some 2,000 yards, and the main difficulties consisted in the overcoming of enemy resistance in the Fonsomme line at one of its strongest points and the capture, or envelopment, of the villages of Ramicourt and Montbrehain, the task of the 137th Brigade was essentially different.

This Brigade, while attacking on a somewhat narrower frontage at first, was faced with the necessity of spreading out fanwise, in order to conform to the lack of movement of the 32nd Division on their right flank. Throughout the action their most difficult problems were:—(1) the filling-up of gaps due to this fanwise increase of their front; (2) their uncertainty about the village of Sequehart; (3) the avoidance and neutralization of machine-gun and artillery fire from the high ground of Mannequin Hill, running as it did right across their front.

At zero hour, the Brigade moved forward on a two-battalion front with the 1/5th South Staffords in support. The latter were ordered to assemble in Lehaucourt Valley, but, as the enemy barrage fell on the southern slopes of this valley, they later moved forward to the high ground above it and so avoided further casualties.

The first obstacle in the way of the advance of the 1/6th North Staffords, moving on the left of the attack,

was Chataignies Wood, a small copse 300 or 400 yards square in which all the trees had been cut down and removed by the Germans, but where the brushwood afforded good concealment for enemy machine gunners and riflemen. The Staffords opened out on either side of this wood, two companies going to the right and two to the left, while a tank fired into it from the front and engaged the attention of the enemy within it. Once past it, the right and left halves of the battalion joined up again and moved forward to the attack on the Fonsomme line, while the support battalion—the 1/5th South Staffords—sent forward a platoon to mop up the wood and the farm buildings at its north-eastern corner. The latter proved to be honeycombed with dug-outs which were subsequently used by us as a Brigade Headquarters.

Meanwhile, the right battalion—the 1/6th South Staffords—had met with no opposition until they advanced against the crest of the hill immediately south of Chataignies Wood, where considerable resistance was encountered and overcome, the enemy suffering severely from our Lewis-gun fire as they retreated down the valley to the eastward. Following up the retreating enemy closely, the 1/6th South Staffords were again held up almost immediately by the defences of the southward extension of the Fonsomme line, which runs south-east towards Fontaine d'Uterte. Here, considerable trouble was experienced from machine guns hidden in concrete emplacements, and was not overcome until the guns had been rushed and the crews bayoneted. The battalion at this period of its advance suffered considerable casualties, but pushed on and reached its final objective on the slopes of Mannequin Hill by 8.10 a.m. Strong patrols were pushed forward at once over the top of

Mannequin Hill; but here the enemy was holding the crest in force, and the battalion, which had been obliged to drop companies to its right flank owing to the uncertainty as regards Sequehart, was not in sufficient strength to overcome this opposition. The men therefore withdrew under orders and consolidated in the sunken road on the near slopes of the hill, where much trouble was experienced from enemy snipers and machine guns both on the crest of the hill and on the high ground east of Sequehart, which had been recaptured by the Germans from the 32nd Division.

The necessity for securing the right flank of the Division had, very naturally, caused the whole Brigade to move much further to the right than had been intended in the original plans, and this caused the formation of a gap 1,000 yards wide between the left battalion of the 137th Brigade and the right flank of the 139th Brigade. This situation was at once remedied by the O.C. 1/5th South Staffords, who threw the whole of his remaining forces into the gap, attacking and carrying the Fonsomme line on the left of the Brigade sector, and capturing a number of prisoners and machine guns. This, however, left the Brigade entirely without support, until the arrival of the 5th Leicesters from the Reserve Brigade.

The original left battalion of the Brigade, the 1/6th North Staffords, after enveloping Chataignies Wood, encountered stiff opposition in the Fonsomme line, where the bayonet was once more used with great effect. Here, the men managed to keep up with the barrage, but at the cross-roads south-east of Ramicourt they were again held up by machine-gun fire and lost touch with the Brigade on their left. Later, they gained touch beyond, only to lose it once again at Neville's Cross, where two field guns were encountered firing point-blank over open

sights at our advancing line. This obstacle was finally dealt with by a party of Lewis gunners, who worked round to a flank and put the guns out of action. The battalion, with the exception of a small composite party of 1/6th North Staffords and Sherwood Foresters, now side-slipped to the right considerably and, as mentioned above, the support battalion was pushed in to fill the gap thus created.

Meanwhile, this small party of thirty-two men—twenty of the Staffords and twelve Sherwoods—pressed on towards Doon Mill, which the enemy held in force and from which he poured a galling fire on the left of the 137th Brigade and the right of the 139th Brigade. They were, however, unable to reach their objective, and, finding themselves out of touch with all other British troops, they were obliged to return to Neville's Cross and the road running south from this point. Here, they maintained their positions for two hours under enfilade machine-gun fire from Mannequin Hill, which finally forced a retirement to a line running approximately north and south, about 1,000 yards south-east of Ramicourt.

Thus, the 137th Infantry Brigade also gained its main objectives to time, but, in order to do so, had absorbed all reserve troops into the fighting line and was subsequently obliged to fall back considerably, owing to heavy enemy fire from the dominating ridges along its front. There appears to have been no organized counter-attack on this portion of the front until late in the day, but the enemy fought stoutly and isolated posts, strongly held, prevented our line being established on the crest of Mannequin Hill and at Doon Mill as was intended, those parties of our Infantry who did get forward being subjected to enfilade fire and exposed to the danger of being cut off. The open nature of the country, in fact, enabled

the enemy to dominate the situation from the high ground on which he was able to maintain himself, and our troops had to be withdrawn into positions where they could be sheltered from this enfilade fire.

CHAPTER V

ENEMY COUNTER-ATTACKS REPULSED—THE ADVANCE TO BOHAIN

ONCE the attack on the St. Quentin Canal and the Hindenburg Line was an assured success, it became evident that the front attacked by the 46th and 32nd Divisions was a likely place for a possible through-break, in which the conditions of really open warfare might quickly be established and Cavalry might come into their own again. One of the most picturesque features behind the line, during these days, was undoubtedly this concentration of Cavalry in our immediate rear. For some days, every dry-weather track was one long line of horsemen moving up two by two; all the roads were crowded with Cavalry transport, and the whole countryside was covered with their camps and bivouacs. Cavalry Corps Headquarters was established at "the Tumulus," and every preparation for a possible advance was made, the only flaw in the dispositions being that success would have been more probable had the foremost Brigades been camped well to the east instead of to the west of the Canal.

It was originally intended to push the Cavalry through after the attack made by the 32nd Division on the 30th September and 1st October, but, owing to the successful resistance of the enemy on the Beaufort-Fonsomme line, this idea had to be abandoned, and the advanced

Brigade, which had been pushed forward in readiness, retired again to the west of the St. Quentin Canal.

Now that the Fonsomme line had been breached and it was known that no organized system of defence lay in front of our troops, it seemed that another favourable opportunity had come, and word was immediately sent back to the 5th Cavalry Brigade to advance and exploit our success. This Brigade, commanded by Brigadier-General N. Haig, C.M.G., and composed of the Scots Greys, 12th Lancers, and 20th Hussars, were, however, a considerable distance behind the line, and some time elapsed before they were able to come into action, by which time the enemy had recovered from their surprise and their resistance had considerably stiffened. It was then clear that Cavalry would be unable to dislodge the machine-gun posts on the high ground beyond our front, and the Brigade was withdrawn into Divisional Reserve and later dismounted and used to reinforce the 137th Brigade, taking up position, together with the 9th Corps Cyclists, in the Fonsomme line.

At noon, the situation appears to have been as follows:—The 139th Brigade were holding Montbrehain and their final objective generally, with a long defensive flank thrown back in the direction of Wiancourt, and with their right flank in the air altogether, since touch could not be obtained with the Stafford Brigade. The latter Brigade, which had reached its objective early in the morning, had been forced to fall back and now occupied a line considerably in rear of that held by the 139th Brigade. Of the supporting Brigade—the 138th Infantry Brigade—one battalion (the 4th Leicesters) was now ordered up to strengthen the left flank of the 139th Brigade, and the 5th Lincolns moved up to take the place of this battalion in the Beurevoir-Fonsomme line. The remaining battalion

—the 5th Leicesters—was held in reserve to reinforce the 137th Infantry Brigade should their presence be required.

The first counter-attack of any magnitude took place on the front held by the 139th Brigade. At 12.30 p.m., enemy scouts were observed moving through Champignons Copse, and these men were followed by troops in artillery formation. Word of this movement was at once sent back to the Artillery, but communication between battalion and brigade was intermittent only, the lines being frequently broken by enemy shells, so that the news did not reach the Artillery until the counter-attack had commenced.

Our barrage thus fell behind the Germans, who continued to advance in waves until they reached the road running due south from Neville's Cross. From here, the enemy in small bodies moved on down the sunken road running south-west from the Cross, and managed to make their way along this road for some 500 yards before coming under heavy Lewis-gun and rifle fire from our troops east of Ramicourt. Foiled in their advance in this direction, they next worked up towards Montbrehain, and, taking advantage of the cover afforded by the quarries south of that village, filtered into the south-west corner of the village, where they were lost to sight.

In view of this situation and of a report received at this time at Brigade Headquarters to the effect that the enemy was massing for a counter-attack north of Montbrehain, the G.O.C. 139th Brigade decided to withdraw his men from the village itself. Orders were therefore given for a line to be consolidated south of Montbrehain, utilizing the Beaurevoir-Montbrehain Railway from the Divisional boundary to 250 yards south of Ramicourt Station, and thence due south to the line already held by the 137th Brigade.

It was only through the energy displayed by both officers and N.C.O.s that the withdrawal from the bottleneck of Montbrehain was carried out without loss, but the troops were finally extricated from their dangerous position and took up the line marked out for them, being reinforced by the 4th Leicesters and the Monmouths, who were sent up from the Fonsomme line for the purpose.

This line was held as strongly as possible, and all available reserves were concentrated in the sunken roads to the north and south of Ramicourt. The enemy soon reoccupied Montbrehain and placed machine guns on the western outskirts of the village, but all his attempts to debouch from the village were stopped by our fire.

During the attack, one section of our own machine guns did very good service with indirect fire against the advancing enemy. Throughout the day, the companies of the Machine-Gun Battalion attached to the attacking Brigades had been of immense help, engaging the enemy's field guns and his enfilading machine guns whenever possible and inflicting numerous casualties. Great initiative was shown on many occasions by officers commanding machine-gun sections, and Lieutenant W. H. Hoff, of the 46th Machine-Gun Battalion, particularly distinguished himself during a counter-attack, instructing his men to take up position on a vantage-point behind the retiring Infantry while himself collecting the Infantry and leading them forward to the attack. He thus gained time for his men to establish themselves in a commanding position, with the result that the counter-attack was held up.

The enemy's retaliatory fire was much heavier during the counter-attack just described and for the rest of the day. Ramicourt itself, and Montbrehain before its re-

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occupation, were both heavily shelled and all civilians were evacuated from both villages. As Ramicourt had become a death-trap, our reserves were distributed round about it, instead of in the town itself.

The line as now held was maintained intact until the night of the 3rd/4th October, when, on the extreme left, our troops were withdrawn from the railway north of the Montbrehain-Wiancourt Road and disposed along that road facing northwards in order to deal with a possible flank attack.

No further counter-attack was made on the left Brigade, but, at 6.30 p.m., the enemy appeared to have advanced and made a gap in our line on the front held by the 137th Brigade and to be filtering through this gap. The advance, however, was not successful. Orders were sent to the C.R.A., and a barrage put down in front of our line by both field and heavy artillery. This was maintained until the situation was cleared up, our line being reorganized behind the protection afforded by the guns. Thus on the evening of the 3rd October the Division held a line extending from the north-western slopes of Mannequin Hill to where the Montbrehain-Sequehart Road crosses the German light railway between Joncourt and Montbrehain. From there the line ran to Ramicourt Station, thence along the Beaurevoir Railway to where the latter crosses the Montbrehain-Wiancourt Road, and thence along that road to the Divisional boundary, west of Wiancourt.

On the night of the 3rd/4th October that portion of the line held by the 139th Brigade was taken over in its entirety by the 138th Brigade and the Monmouths, and the former Brigade was withdrawn into Divisional Reserve.

During the whole of the 4th October the line was held

by the Division under continuous pressure from the enemy, who occupied the high ground all around and made full use of the opportunities for direct observation and enfilade fire thus afforded to him.

On the night of the 4th/5th October, however, the 2nd Australian Division took over the left Brigade sector, and the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Division was placed at the disposal of the G.O.C. 46th Division. This Brigade was used to relieve the 137th Brigade on the right of the sector, and thus the part played by the troops of the 46th Division in this action was completed.

The fighting throughout the action was of the heaviest nature and our casualties, particularly in the retreat from Mannequin Hill and the fighting in and around Montbrehain, were very high, especially in officers, of whom over a hundred fell, including five battalion commanders. Against this cost, however, has to be set the breaching of the Beaurevoir-Fonsomme line and the capture of Ramicourt, with, in all, over 2,000 prisoners and several guns, and machine guns too numerous to count.

The loss of Montbrehain and the slight general withdrawal towards the close of the day were certainly a setback, which cost the Division many officers and men who could ill be spared, but, considered as a whole, there can be no question of the decisive nature of the victory achieved, and this was to be clearly seen in the days which immediately followed.

As on the occasion of the Battle of Bellenglise, the most striking feature of both attack and counter-attack was undoubtedly the high level of *moral* shown by all the rank and file of the Division. Evidence of this *moral* is to be seen in all reports. The attacking troops used the cold steel even more than during the previous assault,

and it is estimated that at least 25 per cent. of the men engaged in the fighting actually fleshed their bayonets. Certainly, the percentage of enemy dead to wounded was very high, and in places, as in the Beaurevoir-Fonsomme line and the machine-gun nests behind it, practically the whole garrison were slain where they stood. This splendid *moral* was well reflected in the behaviour of our wounded, the majority of whom asked to be patched up and to be allowed to return to the firing-line.

The *moral* of the enemy, too, was very much better in the Battle of Ramicourt than at Bellenglise. Not only did the machine gunners and the artillerymen—who have always fought stoutly—put up a good fight, but the Infantry also showed very great determination, especially in the counter-attacks. These were pressed energetically and with considerable initiative, small parties steadily making their way along hedges and sunken roads under very heavy fire from our men. All the enemy troops must have been impressed with the importance of the line they were holding and with the dire results which would inevitably follow a break-through at this juncture. His object was to hold on here at any cost, and thus to ensure a steady retreat to the next river-line. This object, as the sequel was to show, was in great measure achieved, though he was compelled to leave behind much valuable material.

No account of the battle could be considered complete were reference not made to the fine work carried out by the R.A.M.C. in the attention to and evacuation of the wounded. An advanced dressing station was established in Magny-la-Fosse, and the wounded from the aid-posts on the greater part of the front were dealt with expeditiously at that station. The road

from Levergies to Magny was, however, hopelessly blocked by a derelict tank, and cases that would normally have been brought from the left sector of the attack by this road were, instead, taken direct to the IX Corps main dressing-station at Vadencourt.

Throughout the action, there was an entire absence of confusion in the medical arrangements, and evacuation proceeded smoothly and quickly, over 1,000 men being dealt with during the fighting. The doctors and staff worked unremittingly from early in the morning until late at night. The drivers of the motor-ambulances are also entitled to a special meed of praise, many of them working continuously for twenty-four hours on end, driving at the risk of their lives through areas which were heavily shelled both with gas and high explosive.

Many casualties occurred in the R.A.M.C. during the day, and, on the early morning of the 4th October, after all patients had been evacuated, a high-explosive gas shell burst at the door of the A.D.S. at Magny and three officers and twenty other ranks were badly gassed. Major S. S. B. Harrison, in command, continued to perform his duties, though badly gassed, and visited all posts before he would permit himself to be evacuated. This very gallant officer died of his wound and gas poisoning in the casualty clearing-station on the 10th October.

During the attack on Mannequin Hill, Lance-Corporal Coltman, of the 1/6th North Staffords, being in charge of the stretcher-bearers attached to his unit, earned the Victoria Cross by conspicuous bravery in the rescue of badly wounded men. Already the proud possessor of the Distinguished Conduct Medal and the Military Medal, in each case with the coveted bar which indicates that the decoration has been twice won, this N.C.O. has himself contributed a brilliant page to the history of the

Division. During the heavy fighting about Mannequin Hill, word was brought to him that three of our men, too severely wounded to move, had been left behind when the battalion retired on account of the overwhelming enfilade fire from the summit of the hill. On his own initiative, Lance-Corporal Coltman then went forward into the valley in which the men had been left and, under concentrated enemy artillery and machine-gun fire, succeeded in locating them, dressed their wounds, and carried each one to his stretcher squad in rear of our line, thus saving their lives. Without pause or rest, he assisted in dressing and carrying wounded for forty-eight hours, his efforts continuing until the last man had been attended to.

The forward work of the officers and stretcher-bearers of the Field Ambulances was also beyond praise, many individuals distinguishing themselves by their efforts. Major H. D. Lane, M.C., of the 1/1st North Midland Field Ambulance, during the attack on the Beaufort-Fonsomme line west of Ramicourt, pushed forward through the enemy's barrage and, although wounded, continued to search for and withdraw wounded under very heavy shell fire and aimed machine-gun fire from the left flank, from which the enemy could not at that time be dislodged. Later, being informed that civilians had been released in Ramicourt, he went forward to that village and collected them together. He then placed them in safety, supplied them with food, and took the utmost care of them until they could be removed out of danger.

The presence of civilians in Ramicourt and Montbrehain was a good sign. It showed quite clearly that we were getting past the devastated area and into the back areas which formerly were occupied by the Headquarters of the German higher formations.



LC.-CORPL. W. H. COLTMAN, V.C., D.C.M., M.M., 1/6TH NORTH STAFFORDS, WHOSE CONSISTENT BRAVERY IN ACTION HAS ADDED A GLORIOUS PAGE TO THE HISTORY OF THE 46TH DIVISION.

From now on, as we penetrated farther into enemy-occupied territory, more and more of the civilian inhabitants were released. The movement of the armies began to partake more of the nature of a triumphal march, the advanced troops being everywhere received with open arms by the families released by them from a slavery which, if sometimes tempered with uncouth attempts at ingratiating, was still in the highest degree distasteful to the people of the occupied districts. One of the most dramatic sights during the advance was undoubtedly the scene when, in the midst of the fighting at Montbrehain, before even the Germans were completely driven from the town, the few remaining inhabitants, regardless of their safety in their joy at their newly regained freedom, rushed from their houses with mugs of steaming hot coffee, the only tribute an impoverished population could offer to their liberators.

Soon, the tide of battle was to sweep on beyond the ruin of their homes, and they were to be left in peace to make the best attempt they could at repairing their shell-torn houses and to eke out a slender existence on rations spared by our men, or issued by the French Mission. Of means of local subsistence there were left practically none. The German occupation and the subsequent tide of war had left the area bare of everything except a few fields of sugar-beet, and such food as isolated individuals had managed to hide away during the last few days, when the thunder of the British guns was heard approaching nearer and nearer, and the possibility of the upsetting of the German usurpers became more of a reality and less of a dream.

During the evening of October 3rd, the Division received a very large amount of attention from enemy aeroplanes. These carried out repeated bombing attacks

on the bivouacs of the troops in the field, on transport lines, on transport and columns of troops on roads, on all villages within our lines and on other places likely to be used by us as Headquarters, or as assembly-places for troops. The nights were dark, but the airmen were unusually bold and flew very low, while the use of parachute lights of extraordinary brilliance and of considerable duration annulled, in great measure, the disadvantage (from the airman's point of view) of the dark night.

Any member of the Division whose duties took him on to the main roads around La Baraque, Bellenglise, and Magny-la-Fosse during this and the succeeding nights, will vividly recall the disagreeable sensations which passed up and down his spine as he sat in his car, or on the driver's seat of his transport-wagon, or stood in the road in one of the many blocks of traffic. The steady double throb of the "Boche" twin-engined planes was sufficient advertisement of the presence of enemy aircraft in the immediate neighbourhood without the ear-splitting blasts of the warning whistles, barking out their three long blasts from every direction. These latter made many a man whose nerves were not in the best condition long to seize the whistler and screw his neck until he swore never to put lips to whistle again. Suddenly, in one direction or another, a parachute-light would flare out, illuminating the whole countryside, while every man gazed towards the spot where the light was floating slowly downwards, or, if the parachute was overhead, sat still in a state of expectancy, wondering where the fateful bomb was going to drop. There is something very devastating to the nerves about a bomb. It seems so inevitable. There are many men whose nerves are proof against shell fire of any description, though few like it or go out of their way to meet it.

The man, however, who does not dislike bombs intensely has yet to be found, and there are few moments so unpleasant as those spent waiting to see who is going to get the benefit of the next one.

If the light is distant and the plane far off, the watchers hear a dull boom or series of crashes—absolutely unmistakable, and never to be confounded with shell explosions. Relief then makes itself felt in various ways, but mainly by an unloosening of tongues, which takes the form amongst the waiting Infantry of an outburst of talking and chaffing, and usually in the case of transport drivers of a torrent of objurgation, directed impartially at their mules, or horses, or (carefully modulated to avoid danger of overhearing) at the Traffic Control, to whom always the whole credit of a traffic block is given.

If, on the other hand, the plane is almost overhead, the next act in the drama is a sibilant rushing sound rapidly increasing in volume, when all in a position to do so throw themselves prone on the ground, or rush for the nearest shelter, however meagre. Then follows an ear-splitting crashing roar, and a furious tornado of air, with or without splinters of bomb, hurls to the ground everything in its immediate neighbourhood. One bomb has dropped, and every one waits anxiously for the next, which may or may not come. If the bomb has expended its force harmlessly in a clear space, men then rise and feel themselves over, surprised to find they are still “all correct” and whole. If, on the other hand, such a bomb has landed in the midst of transport or men, the scene beggars description, fragments of men, wood, iron, and animals being hurled in all directions and to an incredible distance.

Such an instance of the blind fury of war in its very worst form occurred at the Headquarters of the Division

at La Baraque. "G" Office was here snugly harboured at the bottom of a large and roomy "Boche" dug-out, and on the night of October 3rd a party of seventy or eighty German prisoners from the Battle of Ramicourt were waiting outside in the dusk for their turn for examination by the Staff Intelligence officer. Suddenly, the three whistles were heard and the drone of a German plane became audible, increasing in loudness as the plane approached and swooped towards the ground. There must still have been sufficient light for the airman, who was himself plainly visible to the watchers below, to see the body of men beneath him, though it was certainly far too dark for him to have been able to distinguish the field-grey uniform.

Just before he reached the group, he must have moved the lever controlling his bomb-dropping apparatus, and two bombs dropped almost simultaneously, both of which exploded in or near the unfortunate group of prisoners.

The scene that followed was indescribable. With the explosion, there arose a wail of anguish from the victims of the bomb, and, for a few seconds afterwards, there was a soft sickening rain of blood, fragments of flesh, and limbs, over the whole of the immediate neighbourhood. Some forty or fifty of the unfortunate prisoners, with some half-dozen of our own men who were passing the spot at the time, were literally blown to pieces, while another three or four dozen were lying strewn about the mouth of the dug-out with fearful wounds, nearly all of them about the legs and lower part of the body. There was a rush of the survivors for the steps of the dug-out itself, and the staff, endeavouring to make their way out to discover what really had happened, found their egress completely blocked by

cowering and moaning prisoners crouching among a débris of human bodies. The place smelt like a shambles, and the most hardened campaigners sickened before the sights which were brought to light when officers with flash-lights arrived to ascertain the extent of the damage and render first-aid to the wounded.

A strong party was at once turned on to clearing up the mess, but La Baraque smelt of blood until the day we left it, and every one was heartily glad when, on the 6th October, the Division handed over to the 6th Division, who were taking over the sector, and Headquarters moved back into rest at Vendelles. For days afterwards, traces of the effects of the explosion were visible, and one neatly divided half of a face, found near the Visual Station many yards away, will long be indelibly fixed in the mind and imagination of the finder.

On the 6th October, the command of the sector on a general line east of Wiancourt and Ramicourt passed to the G.O.C. 6th Division, who, however, retained the 139th Infantry Brigade and the Monmouths under his command. The same day, information was received that the IX Corps would attack, with the XV French Corps, on the right and the American Corps on the left, on a date which would be notified shortly. In the IX Corps, the 6th Division were to be in the line, with the 46th Division and the 3rd Infantry Brigade in Corps Reserve, the 46th Division being held in readiness to pass through the 6th Division should the attack made by the latter be successful.

Headquarters of the Division remained at Vendelles during this time, but an advanced report centre was opened at Magny-la-Fosse on the 7th October, and a system of signal communication with a main poled cable route of three pairs was led well forward of this, in anticipa-

tion of the Division going into action during the next few days. On the 8th October, the G.O.C. Division and "G" Staff moved forward to Magny, although on that date the 6th Division was fighting and the 46th Division troops (except the Divisional Artillery, who were assisting the 6th Division) remained in reserve.

On the 7th, the 138th Infantry Brigade was instructed to move forward to its assembly position west of Preselles Farm, and the dispositions of the troops of the 46th Division on the 8th October were as follows:—137th Infantry Brigade in the Bellenglise Tunnel, 138th Infantry Brigade as above, and 139th Infantry Brigade at or around Magny-la-Fosse.

In order to keep Divisional Headquarters informed as completely as possible of the course of events, the Divisional Observation Officer, with one wireless set and with his observers, was instructed to move forward and observe the result of the attack on Beauregard, Mericourt, and Fresnoy, which was being carried out by the 6th Division. By means of news sent back by him, the G.O.C. 46th Division was kept in close touch with a situation which was at times very obscure.

Following on the attack on Ramicourt on the 3rd October, the enemy had evidently become convinced that his position, without prepared defences as it was, was untenable, and he retreated steadily, closely followed by the British troops who were in action continually with his rearguards.

The 46th Division played no great part in the fighting at this time, the General Staff in the main contenting themselves with holding a watching brief; the Infantry being kept in positions where they could reinforce the attacking Division if necessary.

The Pioneer Battalion—the Monmouths—however,

were ordered on the 7th October to attack and capture two machine-gun nests on the Sequehart-Mericourt Road, and the battalion suffered very heavily in the attempt. The assault was made as part of a converging attack carried out by the 6th Division and the 126th French Division on our left and right. These Divisions were to advance inwards and so cut the 139th Brigade, to which the Monmouths were attached, and which was acting under the orders of the G.O.C. 6th Division, out of the line.

At zero, plus ten minutes, " B " Company of the Monmouths, led by Captain W. P. Abbott and supported by a heavy trench-mortar bombardment, advanced to the attack of the machine-gun posts, but was met by an annihilating fire, the two platoons that led the attack being practically wiped out. Lieutenant-Colonel J. Jenkins, M.C., commanding the battalion, personally organized another attack and led forward four more platoons to the assault, but this attempt also was beaten off with heavy loss, Colonel Jenkins and his Adjutant being both amongst the killed.

The attack was then abandoned, having cost the battalion eight officers and seventy men killed and wounded, but it had served its purpose by engaging the attention of the defenders of the trench while the men of the 6th Division worked round from the rear. The garrison of these posts was thus cut off completely from succour, and later in the day surrendered, over 250 men with twenty machine guns and two trench mortars being captured in this work alone.

On the night of the 8th October, the 138th Infantry Brigade relieved the 16th Infantry Brigade of the 6th Division, and were instructed to get into touch with the French, who were believed to be in Fontaine

d'Uterte, our own line running through Beauregard Farm and Mericourt. The 6th Division, remaining in the line on a one-brigade front, were to attack Jonnecourt Farm early on the 9th October, while their artillery bombarded Fresnoy-le-Grand.

On completion of the relief by the 138th Brigade, the command of the sector passed to the G.O.C. 46th Division, the 137th Brigade being ordered to the Preselles area and the 139th Brigade to Levergies. On the morning of the 9th, when the bombardment of Fresnoy by the 6th Divisional Artillery ceased, the 138th Brigade, according to orders, sent forward patrols into Fresnoy and found the town unoccupied, our men being received with every demonstration of extreme joy by the 150 to 200 inhabitants who had remained in the town when it was evacuated by the Germans.

Some machine-gun fire was encountered from the railway-line east of the village, but, after a little local fighting, this opposition was overcome and the Brigade occupied the railway-line.

On the 10th October, Divisional Headquarters opened at Fresnoy-le-Grand, finding there the best billets the troops had occupied since leaving the Bethune area. Although the village had been damaged to some extent by our bombardment and was for some days after our occupation subjected to intermittent attention from enemy high-velocity guns, yet it was comparatively undamaged, many houses being quite untouched.

From the time of the first advance of the 46th Division into the area beyond the destroyed zone, the policy of restricting the bombardment of towns and villages to shrapnel only was carefully followed. From this time on, very little damage was done to any buildings by our artillery, unless they were known to be occupied as enemy



BRIGADIER-GENERAL F. G. M. ROWLEY, C.M.G., D.S.O., BRIGADE
COMMANDER 138TH INFANTRY BRIGADE

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strong-points. Every effort was made everywhere to avoid unnecessary damage; stringent regulations against pillaging and pilfering were made (although, to do the troops justice, these were to a great extent superfluous); and, whenever they were out of the line, the Divisional Engineers were so far as possible employed in carrying out temporary repairs to dilapidated houses in civilian occupation. The inhabitants who were thus helped were intensely grateful, and, generally, the population of the towns and villages were eager to welcome their deliverers into their houses and to do the little that lay in their power to make them comfortable. The relations between French civilians and British soldiers remained excellent throughout, and the progress of the troops through the country was hailed with rejoicings everywhere.

The German retreat, thanks to the stand made by his rearguard on the Beaurevoir-Fonsomme line and the villages on which this line was pivoted, was at this period comparatively unhurried. He had managed to remove most of his munitions of war and the booty captured by the advancing British troops consisted mainly of ammunition, both S.A.A. and shells, with occasional small dumps of signal stores, and salvaged material he had collected, but had not managed to get away. Characteristic features of the evacuated country, however—and this was even more the case in the days which followed—were the small heaps of brass, copper, and iron utensils of all descriptions. These “spoil-heaps” from French homes were a most eloquent witness to the systematic way in which the country had been plundered to help towards the production of the very guns and projectiles which were laying waste huge districts of France and taking the lives of thousands of her best men.

Nothing had been too small or insignificant to escape the plunderers. In these heaps, children's toys lay side by side with old machine guns and rifles, machinery with kitchen utensils, the iron heads of tools with old shell cases salved from former battlefields; the whole mixed up in inextricable tangle with copper and galvanized iron wire from the old French telegraph routes and fences. Never before, since civilization became more than a name, can a captured country have been robbed so systematically and so thoroughly by a ruthless conqueror.

The enemy's comparatively unmolested retreat was secured principally by the efficient manner in which his Engineers had performed their task of demolition. As he retired, he blew up both the roads and railways behind him, and our advancing transport was again and again held up by yawning craters across their path. In the open country around Fresnoy and Bohain, the consequent delay was not, however, as serious as he must have anticipated. Dry-weather tracks existed nearly everywhere, and even these could be ignored by horsed transport on fine days when the surface of the ground was fairly hard. From time to time, therefore, our troops could press forward close on his heels, sure of the necessary supplies of rations and ammunition, while on occasion he was hustled very unpleasantly indeed. The rapid advance of a modern army, however, is not possible without the aid of railways, or at least of mechanical transport, and the system of delay-action mines used by the Germans was well calculated to hold up our progress. At every cross-roads mines had been buried—some of them timed to explode a few hours after the enemy had left, others a few days, some even after a delay of several weeks.

No rule of modern war is more true than that which

limits the speed of advance of an army by the rate at which the railhead on which it is based can be moved forward. Throughout the whole of the present advance and the greater one which was to follow, the movement of our railhead proved to be the decisive factor. So thoroughly had the German Engineers done their work, that the position of railhead was never certain for two or three days together. Our own Railway Engineers would work night and day repairing the permanent way, the rails of which had been blown up with small gun-cotton charges at intervals of ten or twenty yards, and would successfully get the line completed as far as Bohain or Vaux Andigny. A delay-action mine would then go up between Fresnoy and Bohain or between Bohain and Vaux Andigny, and back would go the railhead again for some days, while the gap was being filled by gangs of Chinese coolies, or German prisoners. Once more the line would be put through and trains would arrive with rations and supplies for a few days, when again a mine would throw the railhead back several miles. Thus, the question of supplies was a very difficult one indeed, and one which definitely limited the progress made by the Division.

In its broader aspect, therefore, from the view of the pursuing troops, the chief disadvantage of the delay-action mine was undoubtedly its effect on the transport of the Army. The Divisional troops, however, pressing on in the van after the retreating Germans, were more intimately concerned with the mines placed at the cross-roads, or at irregular intervals along main roads, and timed to explode within a few hours of the German retreat. A party of our men would be scouting carefully along the road when, without warning, several of these mines would explode with a roar, throwing a column of débris and

smoke some hundreds of feet into the air. Discretion came with experience, however; main roads and cross-roads were usually given a wide berth by the troops of the advanced guard, and, if mines there were, these had either been blown or their positions betrayed by the evidences of fresh-turned earth, before the arrival of the main body of the leading Brigade. Casualties were therefore few, though progress was considerably delayed.

Three or four miles to the north-west of Fresnoy lay the town of Bohain, which was entered by our troops on the 10th October. Here, over 2,000 French civilians had been left behind by the retreating Germans, and wild scenes of enthusiasm greeted the advancing troops. The officers and men first into the town were mobbed by an hysterical crowd of men, women, and children, almost delirious in their joy at being once more free to live their normal lives. Here for the first time, signs of business life were seen. Shops were fairly numerous though ill-stocked, and many of the inhabitants were still working in their houses at the silk-looms for which the town was famous before the war.

The town had been evacuated after the issue of the famous manifesto instructing officers and men to pay all consideration possible to the civilian inhabitants of the occupied districts and to avoid wanton damage, and latterly this instruction had been liberally interpreted by the enemy. Little wilful destruction had been done, though here, above all other places, the genius of the German Engineers had been given full play. At every cross-roads, the road had been blown away so thoroughly that only a deep crater remained, stretching right across from side to side of the street, while the houses on either side had collapsed as though built of cards, in hopeless ruin. With these exceptions, however, the town was little

damaged, our own bombardment having been restricted mainly to shrapnel which, while it had shattered tiles and slates in every direction, had done little structural damage. After our occupation of the town, the Germans shelled it intermittently for two or three weeks with a high-velocity gun firing 11-inch armour-piercing shell, but surprisingly little damage was done and few people were injured.

Of all the enthusiastic scenes which the Division was privileged to see during the last weeks of the War, there were few which equalled the reception given by the inhabitants of Bohain to the first troops which passed through the town. The official entry was made later by the 32nd Division, and those who were at the Thanksgiving Service held in Bohain Church on that day will not forget the simple grandeur of the service and the heart-felt joy of the congregation assembled to thank God for their regained freedom. In years to come, not the least striking tribute to the work of the British Armies in France will be the Masses which will be sung in Bohain Church at the hours when the advanced guard and the main body of our troops entered that town, and the pilgrimage to Lourdes which the Vicar of Bohain has vowed to make each year, on the anniversary of the day of the town's release from bondage.

PART III

THE BATTLE OF ANDIGNY

CHAPTER VI

THE CLEARING OF THE BOIS DE RIQUERVAL AND THE BATTLE OF ANDIGNY LES FERMES

WHILE Divisional Headquarters were establishing themselves in Fresnoy, the leading troops of the Division—the 138th Infantry Brigade—pushing forward from Bohain, encountered strong enemy resistance on the edge of the Bois de Riquerval. This wood, an outlier of the larger Forest of Andigny, stretched north and south right across the Divisional front of 3,000 yards. Filled as it was with machine-gun nests and strongly organized networks of trenches and strong-points, it opposed a serious obstacle in the path of our advance. A considerable portion of the wood had been cleared by the Germans, trees having been cut down and converted into timber for the lining of dug-outs and other military works. These recently cleared areas, however, while affording better observation both for ourselves and for the enemy, were still choked with thick undergrowth and were sown with strongly organized defences hidden by the scrub. From well-concealed emplacements, enemy machine gunners were able to command all approaches to the wood.

Thus, on October 10th, strong patrols of the 1/4th

Battalion, Leicestershire Regiment, advancing cautiously along the Bohain-Aisonville Road and over the country to the north of this road, were met by heavy machine-gun fire from the edge of the wood. Attempts to enter the wood all along its front were repulsed, the battalion suffering a considerable number of casualties. Later in the day, the 1/5th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment, who had relieved their sister-battalion, made determined attempts to penetrate into the wood. This attack, which was pressed with determination and carried out with skill, at first met with some success, and the leading patrols of the battalion pushed some distance into the outer fringes of the wood. The principal success was achieved by the Headquarters of the battalion, who established themselves in a house on the western edge of the southern lobe of the wood. The companies on either side, however, were driven back by the enemy, and the Battalion Headquarters Staff found itself isolated, enemy forces holding the wood on either side. Aided by nine or ten Frenchmen, who had become separated from the main body of their comrades and who had with them two mitrailleuses, the Battalion Staff put up a very stout fight and managed to hold on to the outskirts of the wood and to the captured house for some hours.

On the 11th October, while this fighting was actually in progress, instructions were issued for the 137th Infantry Brigade to relieve the 138th Infantry Brigade. The 1/5th Battalion South Staffordshire Regiment was ordered to move forward and take over from the 1/5th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment when and where possible. This was easier said than done. A stiff fight was in progress, and the situation as regards the disposition of our own and the enemy's forces was extremely obscure. The C.O. of the Staffords, with his Adjutant and Company

Commanders, rode forward to get into touch with the Headquarters of the battalion they were to relieve. After riding about for several hours, during which they had frequently to go to ground to avoid hostile machine-gun fire, they were reluctantly obliged to give up their quest and ride back to obtain more exact information. Battalion Headquarters, situated as described above, was then located, touch was gained with it, and provisional arrangements for the relief were made. The actual handing over, however, was not carried out for some hours, owing to the rough-and-tumble fighting on the outskirts of the wood, the Leicesters being pinned to their positions and unable either to advance or to retreat. Communication between the companies of the relieving battalions was established by means of the Lucas lamp and, at 9.30 a.m., the Staffordshire men advanced with two companies in the line, one in support and one in reserve. The right company in the line was ordered to move to the south-west edge of the wood and the left company was given orders to advance towards Fontaine de Colombier, on the Bohain-Andigny Road. Both companies deployed and advanced and, at 10.30 a.m., touch was established with the enemy. The attack was held up by machine-gun fire from all along the edge of the wood, the support company at the same time coming under machine-gun fire from Rethueil Farm, to the south of the wood. By this time the relief of the platoons of the left company of the 1/5th Leicesters had been carried out and touch established with the 6th Division on our left flank, but the Headquarters and the right company of the Leicesters were still isolated in the south-west outskirts of the wood and hard pressed by the enemy. At 2.25 p.m., therefore, the Staffords were ordered to attack the trench system

in the clearing east of Riquerval Farm, with the aid of a tank which was to work south and assist in extricating the Battalion Headquarters from the wood. The tank, however, broke down and was unable to move, and the attack, which was launched at 4 p.m., failed.

Orders were then given for a bombardment of the trench system, and this was carried out by the guns of the 16th Army Brigade, R.H.A., which was supporting the 137th Infantry Brigade. Another attack was then launched, but this also was repulsed before it was well started, the enemy putting down a barrage on the company detailed for the attack, at the moment of its assembly. At the same time, a further attempt was made to relieve the right company of the Leicesters, but this also failed. The enemy, counter-attacking heavily, then solved the problem by driving the Leicesters, Battalion Headquarters and all, out of the wood and down on to the Bohain-Aisonville Road. Here, the relief took place without further incident.

In view of the extremely stubborn resistance of the enemy concealed in the wood, the Divisional Commander now decided to withdraw all his troops to a line conforming roughly to the outline of the western outskirts of the wood and about two hundred yards from it. All available guns were then turned on the wood and a concentrated bombardment carried out, particular attention being paid to the trench systems and strong-points in the clearings, and to the few existing buildings which had been organized for defence, as, for example, the house in the south-western outskirts already won and lost by our troops.

It was now quite plain that the enemy's rearguard intended to make as prolonged a stand as possible on this line. Favoured as they were by the freedom from observation and the facilities for machine-gun defence

afforded by the trees and thick undergrowth of the wood, the obstacle was one which promised to be very difficult indeed to overcome. At the same time also, the 126th French Division on our right, though not confronted by closely wooded country, had experienced much difficulty in making progress against well-organized defences based on a series of strongly built farm-houses, all of which had been converted by the enemy's engineering genius into miniature forts.

On the 12th October, therefore, a joint attack by the French and ourselves was arranged, with the object of storming these defences and once more starting the enemy on the run. The ultimate objective of the French Division was the village of Mennevret, while that of the 137th Brigade was a line running approximately along the eastern edge of the Bois de Riquerval and the western edge of the Forêt Dominale d'Andigny.

The attack was arranged to commence at noon, but, through some miscalculation, the French barrage descended quite five minutes before our own. The enemy on our front, warned by the thunder of the guns on their left, were ready and waiting for our men. The 6th South Staffords, advancing behind our barrage, were met by heavy machine-gun fire, while the enemy barrage fell right upon them and caused them to become much disorganized before the wood was reached. In spite of this harassing fire, however, the battalion pressed forward and, on the left, one company managed to penetrate into the trench system in the clearing which had been the object of the previous day's attack. At the same time, "D" Company, under Captain G. H. Ball, forced its way into the south-west outskirts of the wood, but the enemy artillery, trench-mortar and machine-gun barrage was so heavy and caused so many casualties that

the company was compelled to fall back from the wood. Here, however, Captain Ball rallied his men and, reinforced by "B" Company of the 1/6th South Staffords, coolly reorganized his company and again advanced into the wood at its head. Much opposition was encountered from enemy machine guns, in particular from the house at the edge of the wood and from a derelict British tank which had been abandoned in the previous attack. In face of this, however, the men managed to make their way forward amidst a hurricane of bullets. The two companies penetrated into the wood some 200 yards without coming across any sign of German occupation except the barrage, but, on this line, dim shadowy figures were seen moving amongst the dense undergrowth and the already galling fire was redoubled, while for the first time rifle fire was added to the little inferno already raging.

As it was obvious that further progress was impossible unless the attackers were strongly reinforced, an attempt was made to consolidate the line already held. Officers and men proceeded hastily to dig themselves in and obtain what shelter they could, but the enemy opened trench-mortar fire with disconcerting accuracy, and orders had to be given to withdraw to the edge of the wood. The enemy, who must have been exceptionally well served by his scouts, now dropped a heavy barrage along the edge of the wood, and Captain Ball decided to order a retirement to the high ground west of the wood. Here the original line held before the attack was once more taken over.

Many casualties had been suffered during this little operation and the men engaged were much shaken by their experiences. The enemy was so well hidden in the undergrowth, and so well supplied with machine guns, that he possessed an overwhelming advantage, and this,

to do him justice, he utilized to the utmost extent. There is no more unnerving type of battle than such hole-and-corner fighting as is necessary to oust a well-organized defending force from a wood which they are determined to hold. The enemy's rearguards were formed of picked troops, who fought stoutly and with more individuality than was usually shown by the Germans during these last months of the war. In the circumstances, the men of the South Staffords had been set an impossible task and had acquitted themselves well. Let us give honour when honour is due. It may be honestly said that never during the German retreat did their machine gunners fight better, or more stubbornly, than in those days when Riquerval Wood held up the Division.

Day after day for several days in succession, our troops advanced to the attack, only to be denied by a devoted band of men who were willing to sacrifice themselves, in order to permit the demoralized remainder to walk away in comparative immunity. So, the actions of the 10th, 11th and 12th October, and the skirmishing on the following days, left the Germans on the Divisional front masters of the field, while on our right also, the French were unable to capture Retheuil Farm. For the space of a week the pursuit was checked, while some way of circumventing this obstacle and the Forest of Andigny, of which it was an outlier, exercised the ingenuity of the General Staff. The solution of this problem gave rise to the tactical triumph known as the Battle of Andigny, which we will now consider in so far as it affected the 46th Division.

All frontal attacks on Riquerval Wood and the Forest of Andigny having thus been repulsed by the enemy rearguards, orders were issued on the 15th October for a

general action on the part of the IX Corps, in conjunction with the XV French Corps on its right and the II American Corps on its left. The object of the battle was to reach the line of the Sambre-Oise Canal.

To the 46th Division were allotted the tasks of turning Riquerval Wood and the capture and retention of the Andigny-les-Fermes Ridge. The success of the Division was of extreme importance to the IX Corps as a whole, for not only did this ridge dominate and protect the whole right flank of the advance, but its possession in British hands also gave room to, and ensured the safety of, the passage of the 1st Division, when they advanced through the 6th Division towards their final objective. If the general assault proved successful, the French, advancing up the southern side of the wood and capturing the village of Mennevret, would then press on round the Forest of Andigny and join hands with the 1st Division about Wassigny.

The general scheme, necessitating as it did an attack from the flank instead of from the front, involved, of course, a drastic rearrangement of the forces of the Division. A glance at the map will show that, instead of driving due east as heretofore, the new attack, in order to be successful in its objects, must be made from almost due north, necessitating a forming-up line in the territory occupied by the Division on our left flank. The obvious line for a flank attack on Riquerval Wood was the Bohain-Vaux Andigny Road, and it was along this road that, on the morning of the 17th October, the day selected for the attack, the 138th and 139th Infantry Brigades took up position for the assault.

The objective allotted to the 46th Division was the Bohain-Wassigny Road, from the north-east corner of Riquerval Wood to the village of Andigny les Fermes,

and included that village and the hamlet of Regnicourt. It was arranged that the Division should not take over the line held by the 6th Division, but that our Infantry should take up position on the line of deployment, shortly before zero. By this hour, all troops of the 6th Division were to be withdrawn west of this line, to avoid the artillery barrage which would cover the attack.

As in the case of former battles on a major scale, the approach to the day of conflict was heralded by the arrival of various free-lance units which had been assigned to the Division by the Corps, for the purpose of assisting our own Artillery and Infantry. On this occasion, a troop of Scots Greys was attached for reconnoitring purposes, and a section of three tanks to assist in mopping up various strong-points whose existence was known or suspected. Two companies of the Life Guards M.G. Battalion and one company of the 6th M.G. Battalion were also allotted to the Division. These were detailed to fire in the machine-gun barrage which would cover the advance of the Infantry, or were given definite tasks in the protection of the flanks of the Division, or in the consolidation of the objectives once they had been gained. Last but not least, the Divisional Artillery was reinforced by the addition of four Brigades of R.H.A. and R.F.A., who were, as before, placed under the orders of the C.R.A., 46th Division.

Owing to the nature and direction of the projected attack, the Artillery, in particular, were faced with a very intricate problem. Similar concentrations of artillery had been arranged to cover the advance of the 6th Division and the American Divisions, and the guns of the Brigades covering the former occupied every available gun-position which existed within range of the 6th Division front. It was, therefore, impossible to site the batteries

covering the advance of the 46th Division in such a position that a normal frontal barrage could be fired, and it was decided to try the novel experiment of an oblique or "enfilade" barrage. With this object in view, all the guns were arranged as nearly as possible in enfilade of the front on which the attacking Brigades would advance, and time-tables for a creeping enfilade barrage were made out, the necessary lifts being made on the leap-frog principle.

In discussing this, the last barrage of great intensity under which the troops of the Division were fated to advance in the present war, it may be permissible to enter into a little more detail. The reader of this account who is not conversant with modern artillery may thus be given some idea of the uses of an artillery barrage, a factor which has played so important a part in this war and which has been developed to a very high state of perfection. The idea of the barrage is first and foremost to afford the attacking troops a certain measure of protection, by forcing the enemy to take refuge in his dug-outs, saps and trenches. Intense, well-directed covering artillery fire will so plaster the ground over which the assault is being made, that troops exposed in the open stand very little chance indeed of survival. They are, therefore, constrained to take shelter, and a determined attacking force keeping well up to the line of bursting shells can overrun the strongest defences without much trouble. On the other hand, should the barrage, through badly worked-out time-tables, or through the Infantry being delayed by some unforeseen accident, get ahead of the latter, it is of little use. The defending troops can lie snugly hidden in their shelters until the rain of shells has passed and then, emerging from their dug-outs, can man their machine guns and shoot

down the approaching enemy riflemen at their leisure. Were it not for the artillery barrage, not one attack in a hundred made against strong works held by determined machine gunners could achieve success, while the losses of the attacking Infantry would outnumber those of the defenders to a colossal extent.

While, however, the artillery fire is mainly directed towards the protection of the advancing Infantry, it has other rôles to play as well. By the inclusion of rounds of smoke shell, a dense wall of fog can be formed which not only hides the advancing Infantry from sight, but which, under favourable circumstances, may shroud the whole battlefield. It may thus entirely obscure the intentions of the attacker, rendering it very difficult indeed for the defender to counter his moves. Such a fog may, and probably will, exercise a definite influence in favour of the attacking side, which possesses the initiative and is able to make the greatest use of the power and moral effect of unexpected action.

Again, a well-thought-out barrage has a very decisive effect in enabling the assaulting Infantry to rest and reorganize at intermediate objectives selected by the staff as suitable places for pauses in the operations.

A normal barrage will also assist the attacking troops in maintaining direction under adverse weather conditions and in the confusion and smoke of a battle. In an attack which involves an advance of several thousand yards to particular objectives, this function of the barrage is most important. The effect of the frontal barrage, or rather the effect of its absence, was to be well seen in the present battle. The men, accustomed to hear the guns behind them and the scream of the shells passing over their heads, were bewildered by the transverse fire of the enfilade barrage and lost direction very badly. Much



BRIGADIER-GENERAL SIR HILL CHILD, C.M.G., D.S.O., C.R.A.
46TH DIVISION

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confusion resulted from this, and many casualties were caused by the crews of machine-gun nests which were left undestroyed and so were in a position to fire from the rear upon our men, when the latter were sweeping forward to the attack of positions beyond them.

One other use of the guns which should be mentioned is the retaliatory barrage fired by the defender's Artillery. The plans for this barrage are carefully worked out beforehand in the event of an attack. As soon as news of the assault can be got back to the guns by S.O.S. signals, by the noise of the enemy's barrage, or by line or runner, all available guns are brought into action. These fire on pre-arranged objectives, with the idea of isolating the attacking troops, preventing supplies and reinforcements from reaching them, and inflicting as many casualties as possible during the earlier stages of their advance.

A fair example of the number of shells which are fired in a normal barrage is afforded from consideration of the barrage at the Battle of Bellenglise. Here on a 500-yard front, fifty-four 18-pounders and eighteen 4.5 howitzers were engaged in forming the barrage. Of these guns, the 18-pounders fired two rounds per minute and the howitzers one round per minute. The shells were fired to spread the bursts evenly along the barrage line, so that, in all, a total of 126 shells fell on a line 500 yards long within the minute, giving a total of one shell per four yards per minute. This barrage was kept up for eight hours and, allowing for slowing down of the rate of fire during the intervals when a stationary protective barrage was being fired, there cannot have been less than some 50,000 shells fired on this short frontage during the battle.

While five of the six Artillery Brigades attached to the Division fired in the enfilade barrage covering the main

attack from the north, the remaining Brigade, the 14th Army Brigade R.F.A., was detailed to assist the 137th Infantry Brigade, whose orders were to hold the original line on which the fighting had taken place a few days previous, and to act as the "pivot" of the attack.

In order to distract the enemy's attention from the main attack, arrangements were made for a "Chinese" attack to be carried out by this Brigade, every effort being directed towards giving to this the appearance of reality. With this idea, all the visible and audible signs of a frontal attack on the wood from our old front line were simulated in detail. In the preparation of this attack, the Engineers were once more given opportunity to display the genius for construction which is essentially their strong point and, once more, this work had to be carried through against time. At four hours' notice, apparatus for elevating ninety dummies was made by three carpenters; in addition, the work was carried out to a new design, so that the whole range of ninety men could be packed in one lorry. These dummies were laid out during the night in front of convenient shell holes, in which the men operating them could lie concealed. One man could operate nine dummies and, at zero hour when the barrage opened, the dummies were pulled up, thus giving the appearance of men springing forward to the attack. The men controlling them then fastened the raising-line around some convenient stump and made the best of their way back to avoid the retaliatory barrage.

In addition to the dummy figures, three dummy tanks had been provided, and these also were taken up during the night to positions where they would be likely to attract the enemy's attention. Of these dummy tanks, one was a full-sized replica of the largest and most

modern type of tank. Most of the Division will remember this as a legacy left by the Australians near Vendelles, when we first took over the sector. The other two were profiles only, and were drawn from Corps Stores for the occasion. These latter two were erected during the night sideways on to the enemy. All three were sighted by the enemy and received considerable attention from his guns during the following morning.

To complete the thorough simulation of the false attack, a special rolling barrage was arranged and, in this barrage, the machine-gun company attached to the Brigade took part. This barrage was arranged to come down at zero hour on a line at safety distance in front of our most advanced posts. It was then to move through the Bois de Riquerval in an easterly direction, by jumps of one hundred yards every four minutes. Thus no pains were spared to deceive the enemy as to the real intentions of the Division, and events showed that the trouble taken in these elaborate preparations and the ammunition expended in the barrage were not thrown away. Ten minutes after zero, a heavy barrage was put down by the enemy on the front of the 137th Brigade, thus materially decreasing the weight of enemy gunfire available for the main front of the attack. The attention paid to the tanks has already been referred to, and whole ranges of the dummy figures were torn to pieces, or overset, by the German artillery fire.

During the period of preparation for the battle, Divisional Headquarters remained at Fresnoy. As this village, however, was several miles from the scene of action, an advanced report centre was opened in Bohain. This report centre was connected with Divisional Headquarters by a strong poled route of three pairs of cable and, during the two or three days immediately preceding

the action, this route was extended up the Bohain-Vaux Andigny Road to the farm which had been selected as a joint Brigade Headquarters for the two fighting Brigades. For this extension, the poles of a German permanent route were employed, one cable being slung on the poles at a height of 15 feet above the ground, and the other run along the ground. The latter was fastened to each pole of the permanent route in order to localize breaks caused by shell fire. This route was reinforced by both wireless and visual, but the cable held so well, in spite of heavy shelling, that the latter systems were only employed to a limited extent. The Headquarters of the 137th Brigade was in Bohain itself and was connected with the Headquarters of the Battalion holding the front to the west of the wood by both cable and wireless. The latter proved very useful during the early hours of the attack, when the German barrage made it impossible for some hours to maintain lines to this unit.

Aeroplane photographs had supplied material for very complete maps of the German defences in all the more open portions of the area to be attacked and, during the 16th October, a heavy preliminary bombardment was carried out. Special attention was paid to wire-cutting, and destructive fire was directed for some hours on the hamlets of Regnicourt and Andigny les Fermes and on all known strong-points.

Zero hour was finally fixed for 5.20 a.m. on the 17th October and, well before that time, the attacking Brigades had formed up, with a front of 2,000 yards, on a line one hundred yards south-east of the Bohain-Vaux Andigny Road, the inter-brigade boundary being about Vallée Hasard. The 139th Infantry Brigade advanced on the right of the Divisional Sector and the 138th Infantry

Brigade on the left. One battalion of the 137th Infantry Brigade held our front to the west of the Bois de Riquerval, the other two battalions being held in Divisional Reserve to the west of Bohain and on the Bohain-Seboncourt Road.

The country over which the attack was to be made was very open, the only patch of woodland being situated just to the west of the village of Regnicourt. In clear weather, the task of the flank guides of the different units would have been very simple and little trouble would have been experienced in keeping direction, especially as the objective throughout its length was a well-marked main road. Dawn broke, however, to show the whole line shrouded in a dense fog, which was quite as thick as any of the mists which, during the last weeks of the war, made direction-keeping in early-morning attacks no mean problem. The waiting troops could see nothing of the country over which they were to attack.

Punctually to the minute the barrage opened, and the Sherwoods on the right and the Lincolns and Leicesters on the left moved forward to the attack. The 46th Division was advancing to the last general action in which it was to take part.

On the right of the attack, the 8th Battalion Sherwood Foresters moved forward on a three-company front, "D" Company following in close reserve. Immediately behind the attacking battalion, two companies of the 5th Sherwoods were held in support. The remainder of this battalion were dug in under a bank in shelter of the small wood near the joint Brigade Headquarters. About this spot also was grouped the remaining battalion of the Brigade, the 6th Sherwoods, in Brigade Reserve.

From the commencement of the advance, difficulty was experienced in keeping direction. A gently rising slope led up to the road which was the final objective of

the Brigade, while down the centre of the battalion front ran a slight ridge which divided the area of attack into two nearly equal halves. It was impossible to see more than five yards ahead and the centre company, losing direction, gravitated down the slope of the ridge towards the east and so left the summit practically untouched. The first obstacle to the advance—machine-gun nests on some high ground where a little copse gave shelter to the machine gunners—was overrun without difficulty and, on the extreme right and left of the attack, good progress was made. The right company, in particular, experienced little opposition, reached its final objective without trouble, and commenced to dig in. A sudden lightening of the mist, however, betrayed the presence of this company to some enemy machine gunners who were strongly posted in a clearing on the Regnicourt Ridge which overlooked the position. Promptly seizing their opportunity, the enemy turned a concentrated machine-gun fire on this company and inflicted heavy casualties, the survivors experiencing the greatest difficulty in hanging on to their exposed position.

The clearing of the fog, however, had also given the officers of the attacking battalion their first chance to obtain a general idea of the situation, and the centre company, who had found themselves somewhere immediately west of Andigny les Fermes when the fog lifted, commenced to work their way back across the front towards the scene of the setback, being joined on their way by the Reserve Company. At the same time, Lieutenant M. E. Thomas, R.E., of the 465th Field Company, who was attached to the 8th Sherwoods for the attack, gallantly collected a party of N.C.O.s and men from various units who had become mixed up in the attack and led these men, together with the sappers

of his own section, to the assistance of the right company. All officers on this flank having become casualties, he assumed command and reorganized the firing-line under the heavy fire which was still being poured in from the clearing. At the same time, Colonel Curran, of the 8th Sherwoods, collected a party of one hundred men, reorganized them, and sent them forward under Major Robinson, his second-in-command, to attack the ridge from the north. Seeing themselves thus outmanœuvred, the enemy in the clearing surrendered, and 140 prisoners and twenty-seven machine guns were collected from this small area, which had been the main bastion of the German forward defences. The enemy in this small action showed very good spirit indeed, and the casualties suffered by the Sherwoods were severe. The German machine gunners fought very stoutly, although many of them were under the impression that an armistice was to have been signed on the day of the attack. One stalwart German protested vehemently at our lack of taste in attacking on the day of "peace," his last remark, hurled through the mist as he departed cagewards, being "Noch nicht Friede! Noch nicht Friede!"

The enemy, having been driven from his forward defences, now took up his position on the main Bohain-Regnicourt Road, but the 8th Sherwoods, reinforced first by the support companies and later by the remainder of the 6th Battalion, were not to be gainsaid. The line swept forward, swamping all further resistance and capturing the road which was our final objective. The enemy were thus forced to retreat to the woods beyond, and our advanced troops dug themselves in well south of the road, the Engineers, meanwhile, setting to work on the formation of a strong-point in Regnicourt.

The capture of the Brigade objectives was thus complete by 9.45 a.m. All enemy resistance now ceased, though, throughout the morning, desultory machine-gun fire from Hennechies Wood, and a field gun firing at 1,400 yards range from near the Borne des Trois Evêchés, forced our men to lie low.

On the left of the attack, the 138th Brigade advanced on a two-battalion front, the 4th Leicesters being on the right and the 5th Lincolns on the left, the 5th Leicesters being held in Brigade Reserve. When forming-up, a few casualties were caused through the enemy shelling the Brigade assembly-area with high-explosive and gas shells, but at zero minus one hour, forming-up was complete and, when the barrage opened, all were ready to advance.

Here also the fog caused trouble and, at 7 a.m., the O.C. 4th Leicesters reported that he had under his command elements of the Cameron Highlanders, Black Watch and Loyal North Lancashires—all from the 1st Division on our left—also men from both Sherwoods and Lincolns, besides remnants of his own companies. This being so, it was inevitable that machine-gun nests should have been overlooked during the advance and, here also, these “unscotched scorpions” caused many casualties. No particular hitch occurred on the Divisional front, however, but machine-gun fire from the high ground about Les Gobelets and Belle Vue proved very harassing. These strong-points were cleared in the face of great opposition by the 1st Battalion Loyal North Lancashires. This same battalion was later on of the greatest assistance in clearing the left edge of Andigny les Fermes, in which village the enemy put up a very stiff fight.

Instructions were issued from Divisional Headquarters that, immediately Andigny was occupied, strong patrols

were to be pushed out in the direction of Mennevret, in order, if possible, to obtain touch with the French. These patrols encountered stiff resistance, however, and until 7 p.m., the company of 5th Leicesters detailed for this purpose were held up by machine-gun fire from the north of the village. Later on, touch was obtained with a French patrol at La Nation cross-roads, but the position could not be held. It was, indeed, not until 5.30 a.m. on the 18th that our line was definitely established in continuation with that of the French.

Throughout the action, the supporting artillery fire had been, as it was in all the battles and skirmishes of the advance, extraordinarily accurate, the initial programme being modified accurately and in good time as the situation developed. Especially good was the work of certain "forward guns," selected from different batteries and placed directly under the orders of battalion commanders. Kept well advanced and man-handled by their crews into good positions as close as possible behind the advancing Infantry, these guns were fought with great resolution, and were markedly successful in dealing with isolated machine-gun emplacements and strong-points where the enemy were making a successful stand against our riflemen, bombers and machine gunners. Firing over open sights and from behind hedges, brushwood, or any slight cover which could be made use of, the guns' crews necessarily took great risks and suffered comparatively severe casualties. These forward guns indeed proved invaluable and well repaid the audacity with which they were handled, while the *moral* of our own Infantry was by no means lessened by the realization that, as ever, their Artillery was close behind them and sharing both their triumphs and their dangers in the fullest degree.

On the front held by the 138th Brigade after the attack, no counter-attack was attempted by the enemy, but, at 11 a.m., he was reported by the Sherwoods to be massing for a counter-attack in front of Hennechies Wood. By this time, he must have realized the perilous position in which he stood, and the counter-attack was his last attempt to restore the situation. The effort, however, was not successful. His assembling troops were caught by our artillery fire, and the few men who survived the barrage were shot down by Lewis-gun fire, only one man reaching our trenches alive.

On this front also, much difficulty was experienced in obtaining touch with the French, who were to have joined up with us at the northern edge of the strip of woodland where Hennechies Wood merges into Andigny Forest. Patrols were sent out to get into touch and eventually located our Allies holding a post about one hundred yards south of Forester's House.

Meanwhile, at 7.30 a.m., when the main attack was well launched, the 6th North Staffords moved back to the original line along the western edge of the wood, from which they had withdrawn slightly to avoid our barrage and the enemy reply. Strong fighting patrols were at once sent out and the Bois de Riquerval was cleared without difficulty, touch being obtained with the French north-west of Rethueil Farm.

This task accomplished early in the day, the battalion then pushed forward, clearing Hennechies Wood as they went and securing a few prisoners and machine guns. At 2.30 p.m., the wood was completely free of the enemy, and contact was established with the Sherwoods on the left and the French on the right. Night fell with the Brigade established on the line Mennevret-Andigny and, at dawn on the 18th, the 138th Brigade took over the front

held by the 1st Brigade of the 1st Division, from Andigny northwards.

Later in the day, the whole front was taken over by the 137th Infantry Brigade, who were able to side-slip to the left, to a certain extent, as the French worked their way up and completed the capture of the outskirts of Mennevret. The relieved Brigades then withdrew into Divisional Reserve about Regnicourt, Guyot Farm, and Vallée Hasard.

The Battle of Andigny, complete success as it was, bears no comparison to Bellenglise and Ramicourt as regards the toll of prisoners taken from the enemy. Some hundreds were captured, it is true, but owing to the thick mist that prevailed, the greater portion of the two battalions who formed the garrison of Riquerval Wood managed to slip through our fingers and rejoin the main body of their comrades on the new line they had taken up. The Division was thus robbed of the visible reward of its labours, but, as against this, the men rested on their final objectives and the enemy, especially in the abortive counter-attack towards the end of the day, had left a heavy toll of dead behind him. It was no small feat to have driven him out of such strong positions, and all ranks went into reserve for a well-earned rest, feeling that the enemy had been repaid in good measure for the trouble he had caused during the frontal assault on the Riquerval Wood.

On the following day, the 137th Brigade were ordered to keep touch with the 126th French Division on their right and the 1st Division on their left. For this purpose, one troop of Scots Greys and one platoon of Cyclists were placed at the disposal of the Brigadier. The function of these troops was to scout forward through the forest, feeling their way cautiously and mopping up as they

went. No great amount of resistance was expected from the retiring enemy and none was encountered, but, to guard against the possibility of a counter-attack, these mobile troops were closely supported by Infantry and forward sections of Artillery.

The advance continued without check during the day and, at 11.50 p.m., the 1st Division and the 126th French Division succeeded in effecting a junction at Wassigny, squeezing the 46th Division out of the line.

In all the delicate and anxious work of clearing these forest obstacles, a main feature of the operations was the close liaison maintained under difficult circumstances between the French and the 46th Division. Again and again, in order to envelop some more than ordinarily difficult obstacle, French and British troops were compelled to separate with the intention of meeting again on the farther side of the strong-point or wood in question. Continually during the fighting our flank troops, or the French, were extricated from serious situations by their Allies, and throughout the troops worked together with the greatest camaraderie. The only visible effect of their fighting alongside one another was an obvious desire to excel in gallantry and in courtesy. Considerable difficulty was experienced in gaining touch, and unfortunate contre-temps occurred, as when, at Forester's House, a French officer, advancing through the open under the impression that the post was already in our possession, was shot down at point-blank range by German machine gunners. On the same occasion, further fighting resulted in a junction being effected about 200 yards south of the post, and here perhaps the "Entente Cordiale" reached its highest pitch. French "poilus," themselves exhausted by a day's hard fighting, insisted on emptying all their water-bottles and presented our men with the last drops of liquid

they possessed. It is such incidents as these that, long after the troubles of war are forgotten, will stand out in the memories of the men who shared these trials and passed through tragic days together. Memories of such deeds of comradeship should go far indeed to smooth over the pin-pricks of petty international squabbles, should such recur in the halcyon days of peace.

In after-days, when our minds hark back to these never-to-be-forgotten times, the men of the "cent-vingt-sixième" will be among the best-remembered by their comrades of the 46th Division, while, amongst the most pleasant memories of the Staff, will be the recollection of the courtesy which throughout was the hall-mark of the French Command.

The part played by the 46th Division in the clearing of Andigny Forest and its outlying woods came to an end on October 18th, when the Division retired for a few well-earned days' rest. During the last ten days of battling through wooded and enclosed country, checks were frequent and casualties severe. The calibre of the resistance encountered may be gauged from the fact that, in the Battle of Andigny alone, prisoners were captured from seventeen different regiments of six separate Divisions. They were undoubtedly picked men chosen to fight in carefully selected positions as rearguards, while the main German Armies made good their retreat to the line of the Sambre-Oise Canal.

By the devoted work of his rearguards the enemy's withdrawal to this line was successfully effected, in spite of the utmost our troops could do. A pause in the operations then took place, while the Allied Armies dug themselves in in their new positions, and drew breath for the greater effort which was to break, once and for all, the new canal and river line. The 46th Division, in the

meantime, in comfortable billets in Fresnoy and Bohain, settled down to systematic training for its next leap forward. These few days when the Division rested, flushed with a series of successes which, they felt, equalled the record of the best of the fighting troops of a fighting Army, will not soon be forgotten. The records of the past three weeks were written with blood and iron across a stretch of twenty miles of captured country. Over 7,000 prisoners, seventy guns, and machine guns too numerous to count, had been sent back to swell the tale of captures taken by the victorious British Armies in this, the zenith of their career. Exhausted by the recent heavy fighting, all ranks were in a condition thoroughly to enjoy the rest that had been merited so well.

Yet, while the enemy still stood at bay, rest could not be allowed, even for a week, to monopolize our minds and bodies. A carefully prepared training programme provided both organized recreation and the more serious preparation for future operations which was essential if the Division was to maintain its high level of effort. Each morning, the rolling downs round about Fresnoy and Bohain were crowded with officers and men engaged in tactical training. The afternoon saw dozens of football teams engaged in mimic battle, while, evening after evening, the crowded houses at the cinema and "Whizz-bangs" * were sufficient witness that the lighter side of life was being catered for so far as open warfare conditions would permit.

Meanwhile, the news from all points was such as must cheer the least sanguine heart amongst us. Bulgaria and Turkey were down and out, and Austria was on her last legs. In France, the chief enemy was being slowly but inexorably beaten back ; the roar of the conflict receded,

* The 46th Divisional concert-troupe.

slowly but surely, from the great cities he had threatened and those he had held in iron grip so long. Thousands of rejoicing citizens were being restored to France each day and thousands more were streaming back along the roads to homes denied to them for years. No wonder the soldiers of the Allies walked like Kings. No thought of possible reverse clouded their horizon near or far. Germany, sullen but hopeless, was being beaten to her knees and, already, rumours of an incredibly early break-up were being bandied from lip to lip. Fatigue of body and weariness of soul were alike forgotten. When, on November 3rd, the call came for the Division to move up in close support of the 1st Division, every man was ready and eager to try conclusions with the enemy once more.

PART IV

THE LAST PHASE: CATILLON TO SAINS

CHAPTER VII

THE ADVANCE TO SAINS DU NORD

ON November 1st, after a slight pause for the advance of railhead and for the bringing-up of the necessary heavy artillery, a general assault was once more ordered. The attack was to be on a greater scale than ever before, the battle-front stretching from well north of Valenciennes to west of Guise. The whole weight of the First, Third, and Fourth British Armies and of the French Army on our right was to be thrown against the new German line in one huge sledge-hammer blow.

On our own small section of the front, the IX Corps, facing the line of the Sambre-Oise Canal, was opposed by a formidable obstacle, but, such was the enthusiasm of the men, that no one felt the slightest doubt regarding the outcome of the attack.

On the 3rd November, the 1st Division on the right and the 32nd Division on the left of the Corps front attacked and breached the line of the Canal, the 46th Division Artillery assisting in the barrage fired to cover the advance. The 46th Division, who had during the preceding days moved forward in readiness to exploit any success, passed through the 1st Division and advanced, via the Catillon-Mezières Road, to take up the pursuit of the

retreating enemy. Here, at last, was really open warfare. Never was the difference in *moral* between the British and German Armies at this period of the war better shown than on that day, when, their improvised defences once more broken, the enemy Armies fled pell-mell towards the Belgian frontier. Along the main roads leading from the battlefields streamed columns of prisoners, the dirt and stains of the battlefield yet on their persons, demoralized by their defeat and with open expressions of joy at their capture. Here or there among them strode an occasional officer or man who still held up his head and looked the whole world in the face, refusing to admit his own or his country's defeat. Such men were scarce, however, and those outbursts of defiance which did occur were mostly contradicted by the circumstances of the surrender of the men themselves.

The German rearguards fought well and with devotion, but signs were many that the main mass of the rank and file were beaten to a finish. Visions of a triumphal march to the Rhine were beginning to colour the day-dreams of our men as the battalions swung by singing and whistling, to try conclusions for the last time with an enemy who was already morally defeated. So they marched steadily forward with well-bronzed faces, neat uniforms, and workmanlike packs, no mean sample of the irresistible human tide which had burst the dam constructed by the greatest military Power of our day across the face of Europe. Now the column of German prisoners is past, and a very different sight greets the eye of the advancing troops. It is the 1st Division returning from its victory, and never before had troops marched back from the battlefield more spick and span, as though from a review. Not a strap was out of place, not a button dull. Four by four the men

swung past, exchanging a fusillade of chaff with their comrades who marched forward to carry on the good work they had so well begun. In their one night of leisure, all traces of conflict had disappeared, and the premier Division of the British Army marched to its well-earned rest as to a Ceremonial Parade. Well might the German prisoners straggling along, fifty or sixty in charge of one nonchalant guard, feel that Nemesis was at hand and the day of their triumph passed for ever.

At the end of October, the Headquarters of the 46th Division had been moved to Bohain and, after a few days' rest, the whole Division commenced to march to their positions immediately in rear of the 1st Division. Headquarters moved successively to Molain and l'Arbre de Guise, where the General Staff remained, closely connected by telephone with the Staff of the 1st Division in their advanced Headquarters at Bellevue Farm. Here after the battle, the G.O.C. 46th Division took over command of the sector, and orders were issued to the 138th Brigade to relieve the 1st Brigade and endeavour to locate the position of the retiring enemy.

Active patrol work was carried out on the night of the 4th/5th November and, in the early hours of the 5th, our Infantry had pushed forward as far as Zobeau and Grand Toaillon Farm. During the advance, little resistance was encountered, and four 77-millimetre and three 10.5-centimetre guns were captured.

On November 5th, the 139th Brigade from their new billets at Catillon, and the 137th Brigade from Bois de l'Abbaye and the district round La Louvière Farm, were instructed to pass through the 14th Infantry Brigade and the 138th Infantry Brigade and to take up the pursuit, keeping the enemy on the run so far as possible. Both Brigades met with little opposition and, by the evening



BRIGADIER GENERAL J. HARINGTON, D.S.O., BRIGADE COMMANDER
139TH INFANTRY BRIGADE

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of the 5th, an outpost line was established on the line Barzy-Prisches and to the north, touch being obtained with the French at Barzy. Here some opposition was encountered from the enemy posted on high ground north and east of Prisches, and the advance of the 139th Brigade was supported by a barrage of 18-pounders and 4.5 howitzers.

For the advance, one R.G.A. Brigade and two additional R.F.A. Brigades had been allotted to the Division. Of these, one Brigade R.F.A. was attached to each of the fighting Brigades, the other three Artillery Brigades being held in reserve under the orders of the C.R.A. 46th Division.

The enemy having very thoroughly destroyed the bridge over the Canal at Catillon, all the Divisional transport and the Field Artillery were compelled to cross the Canal by a pontoon bridge thrown across by the Divisional Engineers west of Bois de l'Abbaye. Transport difficulties were thus considerable. The pontoon bridges were in themselves barely sufficient to take the traffic, and the approach to the bridges from both banks was across open fields. These were soon churned into a sea of mud in which limbers and guns more often than not stuck fast, in their attempts to pass over. Traces and harness were broken again and again and, finally, transport had to be lined up in a queue some distance from the bridge and each separate vehicle rushed over at the gallop. It was quite clear that, unless the situation was quickly taken in hand and the approaches improved, the Divisional transport might be held up for an indefinite period. The 465th Field Company, who were working on the bridge, rose to the occasion, however, and a corduroy road was constructed, the bridges were improved, and the transport finally flowed across in a steady stream. So was the first

of the river-obstacles surmounted without too much delay, and the Artillery enabled to dash forward, make up for lost time, and cover the advance of their respective Infantry Brigades.

In the meantime, the site of the old bridge at Catillon had been reconnoitred, and the gap partially filled with fascines, sandbags, and débris. The Canal was thus made passable for Infantry, who could cross with no further inconvenience than wet feet. Motor-cyclist despatch riders were also able to cross, volunteers carrying their machines over, but all other transport had to be directed via Bois de l'Abbaye until the 6th, by which date the Corps Engineers had completed a bridge for lorry traffic.

On the morning of the 6th November, the 139th Brigade advanced under a comparatively light barrage and, when an advance of 1,000 yards had been made, the enemy abandoned his positions and little more resistance was experienced during the day. Both Brigades reached their objectives without difficulty, the speed of their advance being limited only by the necessity of keeping them in signal touch with Division and supplied with rations and ammunition.

The leading battalion of the 139th Brigade, the 5th Sherwoods, had spread outwards on either side to envelop Prisches, while one company of the 8th Sherwoods was detailed to mop up the village itself. This battle was in marked contrast to everything that had gone before it. To the initiated, who knew that in a few minutes a barrage would open up, it was an extraordinary sensation to see the old men and women of the village and the farmhouses about, moving their household effects peacefully in wheelbarrows and odds and ends of carts up and down the road between Battalion Headquarters and the gun-positions. As the barrage opened, civilians appeared in crowds from

every direction, laughing and gesticulating as if the battle were being fought for their amusement alone. Fortunately, the "Boche" had withdrawn his guns and there was no reply, or many lives would have been lost in the streets of Prisches. As it was, the battle passed off like a parade. The Sherwoods advanced cautiously, but with few casualties, and the enemy machine gunners melted away before the fire of our guns, to be seen no more until Cartigny was approached.

While the battle was still in progress, the 8th Sherwoods in support were making a triumphal entry into Prisches.

Nowhere had the khaki uniform been received with greater demonstration. The inhabitants greeted the "point" of the leading company with flowers and fruit and with a strange concoction—a liquor made from a species of prune. It was impossible to keep formation. The advance into the town soon resolved itself into a procession in single file; officers and men pushed their way gently but firmly along, surrounded by crowds of civilians giving vent to their feelings as only French people can do. A lad of eighteen, who had been hidden for four months in a room behind a German officers' mess, climbed up the church steeple with the tricolour in his hand, while German snipers were taking shots at him from posts beyond the town. Little cared he as he climbed until he achieved his ambition, and immortalized himself by nailing the colours triumphantly to the very top of the steeple. Here, as everywhere else, the rescued inhabitants set themselves to do the little they could, both to increase the comfort of the men to whom they owed relief, and to assist them to the utmost of their ability in the task of speeding the "Boche" back to the home he should never have left. Leading citizens

of the town at once organized gangs of the more able-bodied members of the population. Soon, willing hands were hard at work filling up the craters left in all the principal roads by mines fired by the enemy as he retreated. Not all of these had exploded, however. Delay-action mines were numerous, but few of these had escaped the notice of eyes eager to serve their country and her Allies. Mine after mine was pointed out and labelled, and it was in no small degree due to this gratuitous help that casualties from mines were to a great extent avoided.

During the day the advance was continued to Cartignies, which was entered by the 5th Sherwoods and troops of the 137th Brigade, in spite of some opposition from enemy machine gunners. The weather had been bad, rain pouring down steadily all day, but nothing served to damp the enthusiasm, either of the troops, or of the inhabitants who turned out in great numbers to greet them.

Here was seen the extraordinary sight of a battalion marching in fours into a town the outskirts of which were still held by enemy machine gunners, a continuous stream of bullets from across the River Petite Helpe striking the houses. A billeting party, undeterred by this too warm reception, continued its work and the battalion, tired after its day's march, settled down in billets in the outpost line. Many were the amusing contretemps due to this proximity to an irritated enemy, who had had to leave his comfortable quarters for wet and windy bivouacs on the safe side of the river. Two officers of the Sherwoods, having found a complete German officer's kit abandoned by its owner, inadvertently settled down on the exposed side of a house to examine the booty. Wrapped in their congenial task, they failed to notice the attention they were receiving, until a spatter of machine-gun bullets

on the walls above reminded them that the owner of the kit might not be so very far away after all, and that it was indiscreet as well as impolite to open it under his observation.

The night passed in quietness, disturbed only by occasional angry bursts of fire from across the river, where the enemy retained his positions until daylight.

On the following day, November 7th, the 138th Brigade relieved the 137th and 139th Brigades and continued the advance across the Petite Helpe. Here a momentary check was experienced, for the rains had been heavy and the little river was in flood. All bridges had been destroyed by the enemy and, once more, the Engineers were called upon to provide the means of crossing. The men of the 468th Field Company were at once set to work and, before the daylight had fled, no less than three bridges spanned the stream. Later in the day, the 465th Field Company, who had been engaged in filling mine-craters on the main Prisches-Cartignies Road, reached the bank of the river farther to the south and commenced work on a bridge for motor transport, which was completed by 4.30 p.m. on November 9th.

On November 8th, also, the 466th Field Company were ordered to construct a bridge across the river sufficient to carry 60-pounder guns. The site of the old bridge was reserved for a motor-transport bridge, which was to be built at a later date by the Corps, but a place was chosen near by to give the maximum of road approach. A bridge of 75 feet span was constructed, but could only be reported fit for horse transport by nightfall. The enemy was retiring quickly, however, and the passage of the heavy guns was a matter of urgency in order that the whole Division might continue the pursuit. The reconstruction of the bridge to a stronger design was therefore

commenced at 10.30 p.m., fresh material having been received from Prisches. At 12.30 a.m. on the 9th, the bridge was certified fit for the guns, was examined and approved by the Artillery officer in charge of them, and the "heavies" limbered up and crossed.

It is estimated that 3,000 guns and other vehicles crossed the bridge within twenty-four hours of its completion, comprising the heavy transport of our own Division, part of the transport of the French Corps on our right, and the whole of the transport of the 32nd Division on our left. From these figures, some idea can be gleaned of the impedimenta of a Division on the march. Keeping touch with the enemy by means of mounted troops and scouting Infantry is the least part of the task involved, and these days, when three British Armies chased the Germans across a country devoid of food and forage, were not the least severe test on the organization which had to ensure the arrival and distribution of the supplies and ammunition, without which pursuit would have been futile and dangerous.

Busy days indeed for both "G" and "Q." Divisional Headquarters moved every two or three days, and, the higher the formation, the more difficult is the movement of its Headquarters. A company packs up its tin box of papers and the balance of its imprest account and is ready to move at a moment's notice, with or without transport. The move of Battalion Headquarters is a little less simple, and Adjutants have been known to look worried when moves were frequent and unexpected. Brigade is the first formation with a tendency to split into advanced and rear headquarters. Brigade Headquarters transport is of respectable dimensions, though still horse-drawn, and so able to tackle pontoon bridges and the viler roads which lead thereto. Moves of Divisional

Headquarters, however, require some thought and preparation and, of even more importance under present circumstances, two-way roads for lorry transport. The enemy's thorough demolition of roads and bridges was, therefore, a serious obstacle to the advance of the Division. Divisional Headquarters as a whole could not move in advance of the main motor-traffic roads, so lines of communication forward of the Division increased in length and problems of supply became more and more acute. In a similar manner, the enemy's systematic destruction of the railways delayed the advance of railhead and made the supply of Division and Corps a much more complicated and difficult problem. The railway lines, as far back as St. Quentin and Le Cateau, were full of delay-action mines, cunningly hidden and, even if found, impossible of extrication without the chance of an explosion. Day after day, fresh mines went up, when all work forward of the new gap would be rendered useless. So railhead wavered backwards and forwards, and the lorry transport of the Armies was overtaxed and unable to cope with the situation. At this time, it became evident to the Higher Command that a pause would soon have to be called in the pursuit. Large numbers of liberated civilians had to be fed out of the British soldiers' ration and this, while the necessity was met ungrudgingly, still further complicated the food question.

On the 8th November, Divisional Headquarters moved to Prisches and, on the following day, a warning was received from the Corps that further forward movement would be impossible for several days.

The lengthening of the Divisional lines of communication threw heavy work on the Signal Company. At the commencement of the advance, a forward party consisting of three cable detachments and a complete Signal Office

Staff was made up and placed under the command of one of the subalterns of the company. He was given instructions to keep in close touch with the leading Brigade advancing along the main Divisional route, to find out from the Brigadier each evening his probable moves for the following day, and to anticipate these moves as far as possible. In this way, at least one cable pair was laid along the road hedges or poled over open spaces and kept well ahead of Brigade Headquarters, ready for use when a new headquarters was established for the night. This pair was reinforced as soon as possible by a second pair, and the lines made as secure as possible. A Corps cable detachment then followed up at its leisure, making the cables quite safe and improving the route. Whenever possible, old German permanent routes were used, stretches several miles long being sometimes found so little destroyed that it was possible to make them good. In this way, good speaking was obtained between Brigade and Division—far better indeed than between Division and Corps, where lines were even longer. Visual signalling was impossible in the close country through which we were advancing, but, by means of leapfrog tactics, continuous wireless communication was maintained. Wireless proved very useful also for the collection and dissemination of news of general interest.

The ether was overcharged with epoch-making items of news in these stirring days, and the crowds of English and French round the Wireless Press notices, where the English and French communiqués were displayed side by side, were quite one of the features of the street-scenes in Prisches, Cartignies, and later in Sains du Nord.

The bridging of the Petite Helpe having been completed sufficiently to allow horsed transport to pass, the pursuit was once more pressed with vigour. The 138th Brigade

were instructed to make towards Avesnes, and pushed forward to establish themselves on the high ground to the south-east of that town.

Considerable resistance was next encountered in the country south-west of Avesnes and along the Avesnes-Etroeungt Road. Late in the day, the 5th Leicesters overcame the enemy's resistance along this road and established themselves astride of it, capturing a four-gun battery and sixteen prisoners. The French on our right, however, were counter-attacked and forced to retire, thus exposing the flank of the Brigade, and, until the situation was restored, a defensive flank had to be thrown back. On our left, we were in touch with the 32nd Division near Avesnelles and little resistance was encountered in this direction.

The check was only momentary, however, though at one time the enemy's shelling reached an intensity remotely resembling that of former days. For a few hours during the day, the neighbourhood of Grand Maison Farm, where some of our artillery was in position, was heavily punished, but this was the last occasion the enemy's guns were to trouble us at all. The rapid advance of the Infantry and of the screen of Cavalry forced the retirement of such guns as escaped capture.

On the 8th November, this last organized attempt at resistance was overcome with the assistance of concentrations of our own heavy and light artillery. After several hours fighting, the enemy gave way in all directions and the Brigade marched unhindered to their final objectives for the day. On the 9th November, the advance was resumed, but halted according to orders on a general line Sains du Nord-Semerles, inclusive. At the former place, one of those unfortunate occurrences happened, of which the wonder is that they are not more

frequent in modern warfare, fought as it is in three dimensions. While our troops were pressing onwards towards Semeries, leaving Sains on their left flank, French Infantry and Cavalry were pouring along the roads to the south of that town and into the country beyond. The streets of Sains were full of rejoicing civilians clustering round the few Signal and R.A.M.C. officers who had yet found their way into the town, and to whose presence they were not yet accustomed. A party of English officers guided by the Curé were making an examination of the wrecked railway-bridge lying across the main road and of the abandoned stores in and about the railway-station. Suddenly, the air seemed full of the drone of aeroplane engines and, looking up, the sky was seen dotted with British planes circling round the town and evidently trying to make out the identity of the crowd collected in the streets. The conclusion arrived at was soon pointed in a most unpleasant manner.

Bullets sprayed into the town from the machine guns of the planes, while a little farther to the south and east, dull crash after dull crash announced the fact that our planes were bombing the roads near by. For some minutes the bombardment continued, until one plane, sweeping nearer earthwards than the rest, must have picked up the message of the frantically-waving handkerchiefs and hands.

The firing ceased, but not before several casualties had been caused, almost the last cases treated by the medical officers of the Division being some of our French Allies wounded by splinters from the bombs, or by machine-gun fire.

No further fighting took place, though scouting-parties were pushed out through Ramousies and Liessies without gaining touch with the enemy. On the 10th November,

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orders were received for the Cavalry and Corps Cyclists attached to the Division to be transferred to Major-General Bethell's mobile force. The 138th Brigade received orders to stand fast on the outpost line held by them, and the part played by the 46th Division in the war had come to an end.

The 11th November, Armistice Day, while it was received with quiet thankfulness and pride, was marked by no such rejoicings as at home. The Division rested on its arms, thoroughly exhausted after the strenuous work of the last two months. A consciousness of work well done was in the mind of every man, but the main feeling was one of release from strain. The War was won. Time enough for rejoicings in the future; now was the time for utter relaxation of effort. Rest was needed—physical, mental, and moral—and for two or three days the minimum of effort only was asked from the men. Many a quiet toast was drunk at mess that evening, but there was no "mafficking," and the streets of Sains were quiet as on a normal night.

It was a fitting end to a mighty effort. Here, on Armistice night, the Division lay in the town where Kaiser Wilhelm II had his home during the strenuous months of the German spring and summer offensive. Hard by, and well within our lines, was Avesnes, where the Great General Staff had planned and executed their mightiest blows at the Allied Armies. Just ahead of us was the Belgian frontier, already abandoned by the fleeing German Armies, and the crossing of which would pretty well complete the liberation of France from the yoke of the invader. Considering the Division as an entity, as it is to all who have the honour to belong to it, in what better place could its history end?

In future wars the North Midland Division may play a

part as great as in the past, but never will its members have reason to be ashamed of the example set in the autumn of 1918.

The work of clearing up the battlefields proceeds apace, but the Scars of War are deep and will not easily be hidden or erased.

To-day, walking along a country road, the author of this account came across a shell hole filled with bloody water. Hard by, the hoof of a horse protruded from a hasty grave. Again, not many yards away, a British soldier's shrapnel-drilled steel helmet lay asprawl upon the ground.

Blood, hoof, and helmet—all three mute witnesses to one small incident in the greatest tragedy the world has ever seen.

To the living are the Fruits of Victory, but let us not forget our glorious Dead. There cannot be a single officer or man of the 46th Division but has cause to mourn the loss of a brother, a comrade, or a friend of more peaceful days. Let us endeavour to make the England in whose defence they fell a better place for ourselves and for our and their descendants. So may we dedicate our lives, as this short history of the exploits of the 46th Division is dedicated, to those who gave their lives for an ideal.

So shall the men who fell at Hohenzollern Redoubt, at Gommecourt, at Bellenglise, at Ramicourt and Andigny, or a thousand other unnamed places, feel that after all their great sacrifice was not made in vain.

Thus we may leave them lying in their oft-times nameless graves in France, but with their memories enshrined



MEMORIAL CROSS ERECTED ON THE HIGH GROUND NEAR
BELLENGLISE IN MEMORY OF THE FALLEN OF THE 46TH
DIVISION.

in the Souls of their Comrades and their names engraved on a grateful country's Honour Roll.

Shall we prove worthy of the heritage they leave us ? This is the question which faces each man of the Allied Armies to-day, and on our answer hangs the Fate, not only of ourselves, but of the World.

APPENDIX I

GERMAN DIVISIONS ENCOUNTERED AND DEFEATED BY THE 46TH (NORTH MIDLAND) DIVISION BETWEEN THE PERIOD 24TH SEPTEMBER TO 11TH NOVEMBER, 1918

2nd Division.
5th Reserve Division.
15th Reserve Division.
22nd Reserve Division.
24th Division.
25th Reserve Division
29th Division.
34th Division.
75th Reserve Division.
79th Reserve Division.
81st Reserve Division.
84th Reserve Division.
119th Division.
197th Division.
221st Division.
241st Division.

APPENDIX II

CASUALTIES BETWEEN 24TH SEPTEMBER AND 11TH NOVEMBER, 1918

	Officers.	Other Ranks.
Killed . . .	50	541
Wounded . . .	158	2,938
Missing . . .	5	417
Gassed . . .	4	85
Total . . .	<u>217</u>	<u>3,981</u>

APPENDIX III

IMMEDIATE REWARDS GRANTED TO 46TH (NORTH MIDLAND) DIVISION FROM 24TH SEPTEMBER TO 11TH NOVEMBER, 1918

Officers :

V.C.	2
Bar to D.S.O.	3
D.S.O.	11
2nd Bar to M.C.	3
Bar to M.C.	16
M.C.	92

Other Ranks :

V.C.	2
M.C.	1
Bar to D.C.M.	4
D.C.M.	54
2nd Bar to M.M.	2
Bar to M.M.	26
M.M.	366
	<hr/>
	582

Officers. Other Ranks.

FRENCH CROIX DE GUERRE	13	9
CHEVALIER DE L'ORDRE LEOPOLD II	—	1
BELGIAN DECORATION MILITAIRE	—	2

APPENDIX IV

ORDER OF BATTLE, FEBRUARY 28TH, 1915

G.O.C.	Major-General the Hon. E. J. M. Stuart-Wortley, C.M.G., D.S.O., M.V.O.
A.D.C.s	<div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;"> <div style="font-size: 3em; vertical-align: middle; line-height: 1;">{</div> <div style="display: inline-block; vertical-align: middle;"> 2nd Lieutenant R. Stuart-Wortley, Hants Yeomanry. Lieutenant J. H. M. Marquis of Granby, 4th Leicesters. </div> </div>
G.S.O. 1	Major (temporary Lieutenant-Colonel) W. H. F. Weber, R.A.
G.S.O. 2	Major Armitage, R. of O.
G.S.O. 3	Captain D. D. Wilson, Indian Cavalry.
A.A. & Q.M.G.	Lieutenant-Colonel E. Allen, R. of O.
D.A.A. & Q.M.G.	Captain F. H. Dansey, Wilts Regiment.
D.A.Q.M.G.	Major S. F. Legge, Royal Fusiliers.
A.D.M.S.	Lieutenant-Colonel (temporary Colonel) W. C. Beevor, C.M.G., R.A.M.C.
D.A.D.M.S.	Captain W. McC. Wanklyn, R.A.M.C.
A.D.V.S.	Major (temporary Lieutenant-Colonel) W. A. McDougall, A.V.C. (T.F.).
D.A.D.O.S.	Major R. H. V. Kelly, R.A.
A.P.M.	Major T. C. Newbold, 5th Sherwood Foresters.
O.C. Divisional Signal Company	Major E. A. Lewis.
C.R.E.	Brigadier-General C. V. Wingfield-Stratford, R.E.
C.R.A.	Brigadier-General H. M. Campbell, R.A.
Brigade Major, R.A.	Major P. P. Budge, R.A.

Staff Captain . . .	Captain W. J. Bedows.
A.D.C.	Lieutenant Erquhart.
1st North Midland Brigade, R.F.A. . .	Lieutenant-Colonel J. Tonge, T.D.
2nd North Midland Brigade, R.F.A. . .	Lieutenant-Colonel Sir S. Hill Child, M.V.O.
3rd North Midland Brigade, R.F.A. . .	Lieutenant-Colonel C. C. Leveson- Gower.
4th North Midland Brigade, R.F.A. How.	Lieutenant-Colonel L. G. Gisborne.
North Midland D.A.C.	Lieutenant-Colonel R. P. Leach.
North Midland Heavy Battery	Lieutenant-Colonel W. Hind.

SHERWOOD FORESTERS BRIGADE

Colonel (temporary Brigadier-General) C. T. Shipley, late Royal Fusiliers.	
Brigade Major . . .	Major E. M. Morris, Devon Regiment.
Staff Captain . . .	Captain R. Wordsworth, 8th Sher- wood Foresters.
5th Sherwood Foresters	Lieutenant-Colonel G. Mosley, T.D.
6th Sherwood Foresters	Lieutenant-Colonel G. D. Goodman, V.D.
*7th Sherwood Foresters	Lieutenant-Colonel C. W. Birkin.
8th Sherwood Foresters	Lieutenant-Colonel G. Fowler.

LINCOLN AND LEICESTER BRIGADE

Colonel (temporary Brigadier-General) Clifford, late Middlesex Regiment.	
Brigade Major . . .	Major R. L. Adlercron, Cameron High- landers.
Staff Captain . . .	Captain J. E. Vicars, 4th Leicesters.
4th Leicesters . . .	Lieutenant-Colonel R. E. Martin.
5th Leicesters . . .	Lieutenant-Colonel C. H. Jones, T.D.
*4th Lincolns . . .	Lieutenant-Colonel J. W. Jessop, T.D.
5th Lincolns . . .	Lieutenant-Colonel T. E. Sandall.

* These units were transferred to the 59th Division on the 29th January, 1918, on Brigades being reduced from four to three battalions.

STAFFORD BRIGADE

Colonel (Temporary Brigadier-General)	W. Bromilow.
Brigade Major	Major R. Abadie, K.R.R.
Staff Captain	Captain G. E. Elwell, 6th South Staffords.
*5th North Staffords	Lieutenant-Colonel J. Knight.
6th North Staffords.	Lieutenant-Colonel J. Gretton.
5th South Staffords	Lieutenant-Colonel R. R. Raymer.
6th South Staffords	Lieutenant-Colonel T. F. Waterhouse, T.D.
O.C. Divisional Train	Lieutenant-Colonel E. L. Mears.
S.S.O.	Lieutenant (temporary Major) F. J. Wilde.
O.C. North Midland Div. Cyclist Co.	Captain T. S. Black.
1st N.M.F.A.	Lieutenant-Colonel E. A. Wraith, R.A.M.C. (T.).
2nd N.M.F.A.	Major R. M. West, R.A.M.C. (T.).
3rd N.M.F.A.	Lieutenant-Colonel H. H. C. Dent, R.A.M.C. (T.).
N.M. Div. San. Sec.	Lieutenant W. K. Parbury, R.A.M.C. (T.).
N.M. Mob. Vet. Sec.	Captain C. Hartley, A.Y.C. (T.F.).

* This unit was transferred to the 59th Division on the 29th January, 1918, on Brigades being reduced from four to three battalions.

APPENDIX V

ORDER OF BATTLE, SEPTEMBER 29TH, 1918

46TH DIVISIONAL HEADQUARTERS

G.O.C.	.	.	.	.	Major-General G. F. Boyd, C.M.G., D.S.O., D.C.M. (F).
A.D.C.s.	.	.	.	.	{ Lieutenant C. R. R. Romer. Captain A. S. Neale, M.C.
G.S.O. 1	.	.	.	.
G.S.O. 2	.	.	.	.	Lieutenant-Colonel C. F. Jer- ram, D.S.O.
G.S.O. 3	.	.	.	.	Major S. Hay, D.S.O.
A.A. and Q.M.G.	.	.	.	.	Captain M. H. J. Burns-Lin- dow.
D.A.A.G.	.	.	.	.	Lieutenant-Colonel R. Duck- worth, D.S.O.
D.A.Q.M.G.	.	.	.	.	Major H. N. Forbes, M.C., D.C.M.
A.D.M.S.	.	.	.	.	Major K. G. Williams
D.A.D.M.S.	.	.	.	.	Colonel T. Kay, D.S.O.
D.A.D.O.S.	.	.	.	.	Major S. R. Foster, M.C. (F.).
D.A.P.M.	.	.	.	.	Major G. M. Manuelle, M.C.
D.A.D.V.S.	.	.	.	.	Major C. L. Veal.
O.C. Divisional Train	.	.	.	.	Major C. Hartley.
S.S.O.	.	.	.	.	Lieutenant-Colonel E. L. Mears, D.S.O.
Divisional Burials Officer	.	.	.	.	Major F. J. Wilde, M.C.
Divisional Gas Officer	.	.	.	.	Lieutenant R. K. Ewan.
Divisional Salvage Officer	.	.	.	.	Captain K. J. S. Ferrall.
Divisional Interpretation Officer	.	.	.	.	Lieutenant B. W. Dale.
Senior Chaplain	.	.	.	.	Lieutenant S. Read.
Ammunition Officer	.	.	.	.	Rev. G. S. Willimott.
Camp Commandant	.	.	.	.	Lieutenant E. V. Grimston.
Forward Observation Officer	.	.	.	.	Captain W. B. T. Rees.
					Lieutenant J. Walker, M.C.

TRAFFIC OFFICERS	{ Captain H. M. M. Smyth. { Lieutenant W. J. Lyness. { Lieutenant F. T. Evans. { Lieutenant H. J. Winfield.
O.C. 240th Employment Company	Captain D. G. Wells.
O.C. Additional Stretcher Bearers	Lieutenant H. Booth.
Attached	{ Captain F. M. A. Plant, M.C. { Lieutenant B. C. Newbold.
O.C. 46th M.T. Company	Major R. E. Maude.

HEADQUARTERS, 46TH DIVISIONAL ARTILLERY

Brigadier-General Sir Hill Child, Bart., C.M.G., D.S.O., M.V.O.
 Major G. S. Cooper, D.S.O.
 Captain H. W. L. Kearns.
 Lieutenant H. R. Mather.

230TH BRIGADE, R.F.A., HEADQUARTERS

Lieutenant-Colonel J. H. W. Tapp, D.S.O.
 Captain A. S. Beardsley.
 Captain G. E. Bourne, C.F.
 Captain T. Thomson, A.V.C.
 Lieutenant R. C. Davidson.
 Lieutenant T. L. Doyle, M.C., U.S.A.

A/230 Battery

Major J. J. Read, D.S.O. (Battery Commander).
 Lieutenant S. Turner.
 2nd Lieutenant W. H. J. Hooton.
 2nd Lieutenant C. E. Sykes.

B/230 Battery

Captain R. G. Lyttelton (Battery Commander).
 Lieutenant W. A. Prichard, M.C.
 Lieutenant L. W. Webb.
 Lieutenant C. H. Whittingham.

C/230 Battery

Major V. B. Rowe, M.C. (Battery Commander).

Lieutenant A. L. Graham, M.C.

2nd Lieutenant H. Maclean.

2nd Lieutenant W. Emery.

D/230 Battery

Major S. C. Wright, D.S.O. (Battery Commander).

Lieutenant D. Gray.

Lieutenant R. W. T. Jones.

2nd Lieutenant C. P. Burges.

231ST BRIGADE, R.F.A.

Lieutenant-Colonel N. G. M. Jervis, D.S.O.

2nd Lieutenant K. D. Abrahams, M.M.

Captain W. G. Thomson, A.V.C.

Captain J. Lang, R.A.M.C.

A/231 Battery

Major G. L. Wright, M.C. (Battery Commander).

Lieutenant A. V. Maddock, M.C.

2nd Lieutenant W. E. Date.

2nd Lieutenant M. G. Jones.

B/231 Battery

Major G. Campbell, M.C. (Battery Commander).

Lieutenant S. J. Smith.

Lieutenant J. S. Allport.

2nd Lieutenant R. S. L. White.

C/231 Battery

Major C. R. Morris-Eyton, M.C. (Battery Commander).

Lieutenant H. E. Boucher.

2nd Lieutenant J. Lee.

2nd Lieutenant J. C. Binns.

D/231 Battery

Major A. G. Hewson, M.C. (Battery Commander).

Lieutenant D. A. Carr.

2nd Lieutenant S. W. Bridgwater.

2nd Lieutenant N. A. Bramwell.

46TH DIVISIONAL AMMUNITION COLUMN HEADQUARTERS

Major J. R. Wilson.
Captain W. Savory, M.C.
Captain W. T. Wood (R.A.M.C.).

Section I

Captain J. B. Murphy.

Section II

Captain J. H. Thursfield.

S.A.A. Section

Captain H. Payne.

D.T.M.O.

Captain C. A. Paulden, M.C.

COMMANDING X/46 T.M. BATTERY

Captain E. Porter.

COMMANDING Y/46 T.M. BATTERY

Captain R. L. Hunter, M.C., R.E.

ROYAL ENGINEERS, HEADQUARTERS

Lieutenant-Colonel H. T. Morshead, D.S.O. (wounded at duty),
C.R.E.

Lieutenant-Colonel W. Garforth, D.S.O., M.C., Acting C.R.E.

Captain H. J. C. Marshall, Adjutant R.E.

Lieutenant A. R. Page, Assistant Adjutant R.E.

465TH FIELD COMPANY, R.E.

Major W. H. Hardman, M.C., Commanding Officer.

Captain G. H. Jones, M.C., 2nd-in-Command.

Lieutenant A. E. Rome, Section Officer.

Lieutenant M. E. Thomas, M.C., Section Officer.

2nd Lieutenant J. Ainscouth, Section Officer.

2nd Lieutenant L. Blacklock, Section Officer.

466TH FIELD COMPANY, R.E.

Major H. M. Fordham, M.C., Commanding Officer.
Captain H. C. Daly, 2nd-in-Command.
Lieutenant A. Fox, Section Officer.
Lieutenant A. E. Hubbard, Section Officer.
Lieutenant F. T. James, M.C., Section Officer.
2nd Lieutenant T. H. Midgley, Section Officer.

468TH FIELD COMPANY, R.E.

Major G. C. Lowbridge, Commanding Officer.
Captain McGregor, M.C., 2nd-in-Command.
Lieutenant W. Young, M.C., Section Officer.
Lieutenant F. B. Naylor, Section Officer.
Lieutenant M. R. Boyce, Section Officer.
Lieutenant R. D. T. Collier, Section Officer.

46TH DIVISIONAL SIGNAL COMPANY, R.E.

Major E. A. Lewis, D.S.O., Officer Commanding.
Captain R. E. Priestley, M.C., 2nd-in-Command.
Captain S. W. Kirby, M.C., O.C. R.A. Signals.
Lieutenant W. H. Aldrich, O.C. Signals, 137th Brigade.
Lieutenant M. V. Jones, O.C. Signals, 138th Brigade.
Lieutenant F. H. Steggall, M.C., O.C. Signals, 139th Brigade.
Lieutenant G. A. Knapp, M.C., O.C. Signals, 231st Brigade,
R.F.A.

Lieutenant S. A. Moore, O.C. No. 1 Section.
Lieutenant H. S. Walker, Wireless Officer.
Lieutenant A. C. Cowe, Section Officer.
2nd Lieutenant R. G. Wills, M.C., M.M., O.C. Signals, 230th
Brigade, R.F.A.
2nd Lieutenant R. S. Lowe.
2nd Lieutenant W. E. Thomas.
2nd Lieutenant R. V. Jenner, O.C. Signals, Machine Gun
Battalion.
2nd Lieutenant A. P. Boone, Wireless Officer.

137TH INFANTRY BRIGADE

Brigadier-General J. V. Campbell, V.C., C.M.G., D.S.O.,
Brigade Commander.
Captain A. C. T. White, V.C., M.C., Brigade Major.

Captain I. Jackson, M.C., Staff Captain.
 Lieutenant C. R. Krell, Intelligence Officer.
 Lieutenant S. B. Bridgwood, M.C., Brigade Bombing Officer.
 Captain J. D. Luckhoff, " G " Learner.
 2nd Lieutenant R. Briars, " Q " Learner.

1/5TH BATTALION SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE REGIMENT

Lieutenant-Colonel A. White, D.S.O., Commanding Officer.
 Major C. C. Dowding, D.S.O., M.C., 2nd-in-Command.
 Captain A. E. Machin, Adjutant.
 2nd Lieutenant W. J. Bond, Intelligence Officer.
 2nd Lieutenant C. H. Walton, Lewis Gun Officer.
 Captain G. H. Ball, D.S.O., M.C.
 2nd Lieutenant L. F. Burton, M.C., M.M.
 2nd Lieutenant C. S. Embrey, M.C.
 Captain W. C. Duffield, Quartermaster.
 Lieutenant E. Wigzell, Transport Officer.

Company Commanders

Captain L. L. Tyler.
 Lieutenant R. H. Gillender, M.C.
 Captain E. J. H. Meynell, M.C.

Platoon Commanders

2nd Lieutenant	C. Jones,	M.C.
"	"	H. Howell.
"	"	W. B. Brown.
"	"	J. B. Bushby.
"	"	W. Payne.
"	"	A. C. Moore, M.M.
"	"	A. C. Bull.
"	"	J. V. Blunt.
"	"	L. Pearson.
"	"	H. Hooper.
"	"	A. J. Musgrove.
"	"	J. N. Whittaker.
"	"	H. G. Waters.
"	"	A. W. Vizer, M.M.

1/6TH BATTALION SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE REGIMENT

Lieutenant-Colonel C. Lister, D.S.O., M.C., Commanding Officer.

Major J. M. Frew, M.C., 2nd-in-Command.

Captain J. P. Wood, Adjutant.

2nd Lieutenant T. L. Freeman, Signal Officer.

Company Commanders

Captain G. S. Harris, M.C.

Major E. Lewis.

Captain P. R. Teeton, M.C.

Captain A. P. Buswell, M.C.

Platoon Commanders

2nd Lieutenant F. C. Beech.

" " G. Evans.

" " C. W. Briand.

" " J. Baker, M.C.

" " P. W. Burgess, M.C., M.M.

" " F. A. Morgan, M.C.

Lieutenant M. E. Williams, M.C.

2nd Lieutenant H. Watts, D.C.M.

" " J. Robinson.

" " S. Walters, M.C.

" " C. P. H. Sylvester.

" " L. J. Knight.

" " R. Smith.

" " H. W. Wooton.

Lieutenant J. A. Armstrong, M.C.

" H. C. Marriott, M.C.

1/6TH BATTALION NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE REGIMENT

Lieutenant-Colonel T. R. Evans, Commanding.

Captain V. E. Green, Adjutant.

Lieutenant F. E. Burt, Assistant Adjutant.

Captain G. Maher, Quartermaster.

Captain M. Radcliffe, Transport Officer.

Lieutenant J. R. Wicks, Signal Officer.

Lieutenant T. Beale, Lewis Gun Officer.

Company Commanders

2nd Lieutenant H. N. Thompson.
 Captain A. H. Charlton, D.S.O., M.C.
 2nd Lieutenant F. L. May.
 Captain F. J. Newton, M.C.

Platoon Commanders

2nd Lieutenant	W. S. Angus.
"	" F. E. Brindley.
"	" E. W. Parkinson.
"	" A. E. Chambers.
"	" W. Woodward.
"	" W. J. A. Ensor.
"	" C. B. E. King.
"	" L. Roberts.
"	" J. Beelingham, M.C.
"	" R. H. Sennett.
"	" R. Barron.

Captain P. H. Bellanger, M.C., Medical Officer.
 Captain F. W. Cleveland, M.C., Chaplain.

137TH TRENCH MORTAR BATTERY

Captain B. D. Hatchett, M.C., Commanding.
 Lieutenant H. Gregory.
 Lieutenant J. Oulton.
 2nd Lieutenant T. R. D. Davies.

138TH INFANTRY BRIGADE

Brigadier-General F. G. M. Rowley, C.M.G., D.S.O., Brigade
 Commander.
 Captain D. Hill, M.C., Brigade Major.
 Captain E. A. Huskinson, Staff Captain.
 Lieutenant H. N. Salter, Intelligence Officer.
 Captain C. Schiller, M.C., " Q " Learner.

APPENDIX V

1/5TH BATTALION, LINCOLNSHIRE REGIMENT

Lieutenant-Colonel H. G. Wilson, D.S.O., Commanding.
 Captain R. White, Adjutant.
 Captain J. C. Urquhart, M.C.
 Lieutenant F. C. King, Signal Officer.
 Captain J. H. Lloyd Williams, M.C., Medical Officer.

Company Commanders

Lieutenant G. H. Quantrill, M.C.
 Captain R. G. Dunn.
 Lieutenant W. Cheer.
 Captain W. H. G. Smyth.

Platoon Commanders

Lieutenant H. Bamber.
 „ E. A. Dennis.
 „ C. R. Madden, M.C.
 „ H. F. Hawkeswood.
 „ R. D. Lepine.
 2nd Lieutenant A. C. Fisher.
 „ „ R. S. Lord.
 Lieutenant J. W. Mansfield.
 2nd Lieutenant W. A. Giles.
 „ „ F. S. Skinner.
 „ „ A. G. Black, M.C.
 Lieutenant R. B. Harris.
 2nd Lieutenant F. W. L. Few.
 „ „ J. H. Hopkins.
 „ „ W. Whapples.
 41424 Sergeant N. Smith.

1/4TH BATTALION, LEICESTERSHIRE REGIMENT

Lieutenant-Colonel F. W. Foster, M.C., Commanding.
 Major G. R. A. Beckett, M.C., 2nd-in-Command.
 Captain D. W. Howarth, Adjutant.
 2nd Lieutenant W. L. Bass, Intelligence Officer.
 „ „ A. F. Castle, Signal Officer.
 „ „ W. K. Fox.
 Captain G. S. Brown, Medical Officer.
 Lieutenant J. A. Tyler, Transport Officer.
 „ M. F. Shepherd, D.C.M., Quartermaster.

Company Commanders

Lieutenant A. B. Pick.
 Captain J. C. Ledward.
 „ G. L. Lea.
 „ H. F. Papprell.

Platoon Commanders

2nd Lieutenant J. H. Watson.
 „ „ C. Morbey.
 „ „ H. N. Lacey.
 „ „ H. J. Partridge.
 „ „ M. Lamont.
 „ „ J. Turton.
 „ „ F. H. Wills.
 „ „ W. L. Barber.
 „ „ R. C. Quayle.
 „ „ E. Cashmore.
 „ „ C. H. Wood.
 „ „ H. E. Schoffield.
 „ „ D. J. Brewin.
 Lieutenant T. R. Flynn.
 36381 Sergeant H. Dobson.
 11087 „ C. W. Bugden.

1/5TH BATTALION LEICESTERSHIRE REGIMENT

Major J. L. Griffiths, D.S.O., Commanding.
 Captain G. E. Banwell, M.C., Acting 2nd-in-Command
 Captain J. D. Hills, M.C., Adjutant.
 Lieutenant K. Ashdowne, M.C., Intelligence Officer.
 Captain W. A. Nicholson, Quartermaster.
 2nd Lieutenant W. R. Todd, Transport Officer.
 Captain W. B. Jack, M.C., Medical Officer.
 Captain the Rev. C. B. W. Buck, M.C., Chaplain.

Company Commanders

Lieutenant A. E. Brodribb, M.C.
 Captain J. W. Tomson.
 „ A. E. Hawley, M.C.
 „ J. R. Brooke, M.C.

APPENDIX V

Platoon Commanders

2nd Lieutenant A. Asher.
 " " H. J. Quint.
 " " S. H. Dennis.
 " " J. W. Lewin.
 " " E. Cosgrove.
 Lieutenant S. G. H. Steel, M.C.
 " J. C. Barrett, V.C.
 2nd Lieutenant A. Johnson.
 " W. W. Parsons.
 Lieutenant S. Corah.
 " D. T. Sloper.
 2nd Lieutenant J. G. E. Buckley.
 240467 Sergeant P. Bowler.
 240919 Lance-Sergeant G. Fowkes.
 240118 Corporal B. Mead.
 242599 Sergeant R. B. Haynes.

138TH TRENCH MORTAR BATTERY

Captain A. N. Bloor, Commanding.
 Lieutenant A. Ramsden.
 " A. C. De Brisay.

139TH INFANTRY BRIGADE

Brigadier-General J. Harington, D.S.O., Brigade Commander.
 Captain E. J. Grinling, M.C., Brigade Major.
 Captain W. C. C. Weetman, M.C., Staff Captain.
 Lieutenant A. G. T. Lomer, Intelligence Officer.
 Lieutenant W. A. Lytle, M.C.
 Lieutenant F. Clay, Transport Officer.

1/5TH BATTALION SHERWOOD FORESTERS

Lieutenant-Colonel A. Hacking, D.S.O., M.C., Commanding.
 Captain R. S. Pratt, M.C., 2nd-in-Command.
 Lieutenant (Acting Captain) J. B. Raymond, M.C., Adjutant.
 Lieutenant G. H. Williamson, Intelligence Officer.
 Lieutenant S. G. Faire, M.C., Signal Officer.
 2nd Lieutenant E. H. Kirkby, Lewis Gun Officer.
 Lieutenant D. Mackenzie, Quartermaster.

Lieutenant C. S. Blackwood, Transport Officer.
 Lieutenant J. Charnley, Medical Officer.
 Rev. E. H. Hines, Chaplain.

Company Commanders

Lieutenant (Acting Captain) D. Smith, M.C.
 2nd Lieutenant J. N. Jacques, M.C.
 Captain C. N. Littleboy, M.C.
 Lieutenant (Acting Captain) H. V. Howard, M.C.

Platoon Commanders

Lieutenant J. F. Crellin, M.C.
 R. G. Whittaker, M.C.
 2nd Lieutenant J. C. Wheatley.
 " " A. H. T. Gent.
 " " M. D. Barrows.
 " " R. N. Lakeman.
 Lieutenant E. F. Ann.
 2nd Lieutenant F. R. Hartshorne.
 " " T. Moulton.
 " " C. W. Holmes.
 " " J. R. Dench, M.C.
 " " F. T. Metcalfe, M.C.

I/6TH BATTALION SHERWOOD FORESTERS

Lieutenant-Colonel B. W. Vann, M.C., Commanding.
 Major J. A. Shedden, D.S.O., M.C., 2nd-in-Command.
 Captain E. F. Winser, M.C., Acting 2nd-in-Command.
 Captain E. Kershaw, M.C., Adjutant.
 Captain W. T. Stephens, Signal Officer.
 2nd Lieutenant A. Mackintosh, M.C., Scout Officer.
 2nd Lieutenant R. E. H. Stott.
 Captain S. B. Boulton, Quartermaster.
 Lieutenant H. D. Vaughan, Transport Officer.
 Major A. W. Shea, D.S.O., Medical Officer.

Company Commanders

Lieutenant J. N. Wightman, M.C.
 Captain H. S. Pink, M.C.
 Lieutenant (Acting Captain) J. F. Dennis, M.C.
 Captain F. W. Hipkins, M.C.

APPENDIX V

Platoon Commanders

2nd Lieutenant	C. B. Newell, M.C.
"	F. Touch, M.C., D.C.M.
"	H. A. Payne.
"	R. A. Frith, M.C.
"	C. E. Wardle.
"	W. Bavin.
"	P. A. Tompkinson.
"	A. J. Tyrell.
"	A. Jephson.
"	C. Bimrose, M.C.
"	W. Meakin.
"	E. Scarrott.

1/8TH BATTALION SHERWOOD FORESTERS

Lieutenant-Colonel J. Finlay Dempster, D.S.O., Commanding Officer.

Captain C. P. Elliott, M.C., Acting 2nd-in-Command.

Captain C. H. Powell, Acting Adjutant.

Lieutenant S. A. Tebbutt, Signal Officer.

2nd Lieutenant W. J. Winter, M.C.

2nd Lieutenant R. S. Plant.

Lieutenant H. M. Toyne, Acting Transport Officer.

Captain St. G. M. L. Homan, M.C., Medical Officer.

Captain Rev. D. E. Sturt, M.C., Chaplain.

Company Commanders

Captain G. Thomas, M.C.

2nd Lieutenant J. Bloor, M.C., M.M.

Lieutenant S. E. Cairns, M.C.

Captain J. B. White, M.C.

Platoon Commanders

2nd Lieutenant	S. Bradwell, M.C., D.C.M.
"	J. F. Shackleton, M.C.
"	R. M. Barker.
"	F. T. W. Saunders.
"	P. A. Turner.

2nd Lieutenant C. M. Bedford.
 „ „ A. D. H. Dunkin.
 „ „ F. L. Harrap, M.C.
 „ „ A. N. Davis.
 „ „ James H. Smith, M.C.
 „ „ T. F. Mitchell, M.C.
 „ „ John H. Smith.

139TH TRENCH MORTAR BATTERY

Captain J. L. Percival, M.C., Commanding.
 Lieutenant S. Sanders.
 „ R. H. Wood.
 „ H. Edson, M.C.
 2nd Lieutenant V. L. Morris.

1/1ST BATTALION MONMOUTHSHIRE REGIMENT

Lieutenant-Colonel J. Jenkins, M.C., Commanding Officer.
 Major F. G. Phillips, 2nd-in-Command.
 Captain W. M. James, Adjutant.
 Lieutenant G. H. T. Cochrane, Signal Officer.
 Lieutenant F. L. Moore, M.C., Lewis Gun Officer.
 Captain W. P. Abbott, Quartermaster.
 Lieutenant S. G. Blow, M.C., Transport Officer.
 Captain K. McAlpine, Medical Officer.

Company Commanders

Captain E. G. St. C. Tisdall.
 „ W. M. B. Burnyeat, M.C.
 Lieutenant A. W. Goldsworthy.

Platoon Commanders

2nd Lieutenant C. T. Blackwall.
 Lieutenant H. E. Sharpe.
 2nd Lieutenant A. S. Hixon.
 228024 Sergeant G. Howes.
 2nd Lieutenant H. C. Archer.
 Lieutenant J. R. Evans.
 „ G. P. Peachell.
 227751 Lance-Sergeant F. J. Leonard.
 2nd Lieutenant H. R. Rowland,

APPENDIX V

2nd Lieutenant A. T. Williams.

225785 Sergeant C. Borchert.

Lieutenant H. J. C. Haines.

1/1st North Midland Field Ambulance, Lieutenant-Colonel
T. A. Barron, D.S.O., R.A.M.C., Commanding.

1/2nd North Midland Field Ambulance, Major G. H. H.
Manfield, M.C., R.A.M.C., Commanding.

1/3rd North Midland Field Ambulance, Lieutenant-Colonel
A. C. F. Turner, D.S.O., R.A.M.C., Commanding.

46TH BATTALION MACHINE GUN CORPS

Lieutenant-Colonel B. Mathew-Lannowe, D.S.O., Com-
manding.

Major G. A. Wade, M.C., 2nd-in-Command.

Captain R. Dickens, Adjutant.

2nd Lieutenant A. C. Park, Intelligence Officer.

Captain M. J. Somerfield, Quartermaster.

Company Commanders

Major H. S. Windeler, M.C.

„ H. Witty.

„ W. T. Boughey, M.C.

„ M. Douglas.

Second-in-Command of Companies

Captain R. Page.

„ T. A. N. Walker.

„ A. R. M. Darby, M.C.

Lieutenant N. MacVie.

Company Transport Officers

Captain G. Woody.

Lieutenant W. Harris, M.C.

„ H. A. Spendlove.

Section Officers

Lieutenant W. H. Hoff, M.C.

„ H. L. C. Guthrie.

„ S. A. Parkes.

2nd Lieutenant H. Johnson.

Lieutenant A. E. Cowley.
 A. W. Briggs.
2nd Lieutenant W. G. Oncken.
 J. R. Wilson.
Lieutenant C. G. Larking.
 C. J. Highwood.
2nd Lieutenant S. A. Earl.
 R. R. Willing.
Lieutenant H. W. Rudland.
 F. A. K. Park.
 W. Ackland.
2nd Lieutenant B. A. Lane.

Sub-Section Commanders

Lieutenant J. M. Kitching.
 J. W. E. Warren.

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