

My field ambulance during the period covered by his despatch was in the 38th Division (131st Ad Amb).

SPECIAL ORDER OF THE DAY.



BY

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Commanding 38th (Welsh) Division.

MONDAY, 13th JANUARY, 1919.

THE FOLLOWING EXTRACTS FROM THE VICTORY DESPATCH OF THE FIELD MARSHAL COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF ARE PUBLISHED FOR INFORMATION OF ALL RANKS.

FIRST PHASE.

Opening Attacks: Albert. Early on the morning of 22nd August the IIIrd Corps of the Fourth Army, assisted by a small number of Tanks, attacked with the 47th, 12th and 18th Divisions, the 3rd Australian Division and the 38th Division co-operating on either flank. By this attack, in which the 18th Division (Major-General R. P. LEE) forced the passage of the River ANCRE and captured ALBERT by a well-executed enveloping movement from the South-east, our line between the SOMME and the ANCRE was advanced well to the East of the BRAY-ALBERT Road. The left of the Fourth Army was brought forward in conformity with the remainder of our line, and over 2,400 prisoners and a few guns were taken by us.

The Main Attack Launched. At 4-45 a.m. on the 23rd August the 18th Division and the right Brigade of the 38th Division of the IIIrd and Vth Corps recommenced their attacks about ALBERT, and by a well-executed operation, entailing hard fighting at different points, captured the high ground East of the Town known as TARA and USNA HILLS. At the same time two Companies of the Welsh Regiment, part of the left Brigade of the 38th Welsh Division, waded the ANCRE in the neighbourhood of HAMEL, and with great gallantry maintained themselves all day East of the River against constant counter attacks.

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On the front of the Third Army, the same Divisions which had delivered the attacks on the previous day again moved forward against the beaten enemy and pressed them back rapidly. The German positions on the THIEPVAL RIDGE were carried by a well conceived and admirably executed concentric attack, directed upon the high ground about POZIERES from the South West and North West. In this brilliant operation the Brigade of the 38th Division attacking on the right, crossed the ANCRE at ALBERT during the early part of the night, and formed up close to the German lines on a narrow front between the ALBERT-POZIERES Road and the marshes of the ANCRE. The left Brigade of the same Division waded breast deep through the flooded stream opposite HAMEL, under heavy fire and formed up in the actual process of a German counter attack along the line held by the two Companies who had crossed on the previous morning. At the given hour the Brigades of the 38th Division advanced in concert with the other Divisions of the Vth Corps on their left and drove the enemy from the high ground about OVILLERS and THIEPVAL. Continuing their advance, the Divisions of the Vth Corps gained POZIERES, COURCELETTE, and MARTINPUICH.

Both on the 27th and 28th August the 38th (Welsh) Division (Major-General T. A. CUBITT) was engaged in bitter fighting about LONGUEVAL and DELVILLE WOOD, and made progress in company with the 17th Division (Major-General P. R. ROBERTSON) attacking towards FLEURS.

By the night of the 30th August the line of the Fourth and Third Armies North of the SOMME ran from CLERY-sur-SOMME past the Western edge of MARRIERES Wood to COMBLES, LES BŒUFS, BANCOURT, FREMICOURT, and VRAUCOURT, and thence to the Western outskirts of ECOUST, BULLECOURT and HENDECOURT. Any further advance would threaten the enemy's line South of PERONNE along the East bank of the SOMME, to which our progress North of the River had already forced him to retreat.

On the Third Army front there was hard fighting on both these days (31st August and 1st September). At the close of it we held SAILLY-SAILLISEL, MORVAL, BAULENCOURT, and RIENCOURT-les-BAPAUME.

The Results of the Battle of Bapaume. The 1st September marks the close of the second stage in the British offensive. Having in the first stage freed AMIENS by our brilliant success East of that town, in the second stage the troops of the Third and Fourth Armies comprising 23 British Divisions, by skilful leading, hard fighting, and relentless and unremitting pursuit, in 10 days had driven 35 German Divisions from one side of the old SOMME battlefield to the other, thereby turning the line of the River SOMME. In so doing they had inflicted upon the enemy the heaviest losses in killed and wounded, and had taken from him over 34,000 prisoners and 270 guns. For the remarkable success of the battle of BAPAUME the greatest credit is due to the excellence of the Staff arrangements of all formations, and to the most able conduct of the operations of the Third Army by its Commander, General BYNG.

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The Enemy in Retreat. The result of the battles of AMIENS, BAPAUME, and the SCARPE now declared itself.

During the night of the 2nd/3rd September the enemy fell back rapidly on the whole front of the Third Army and the right of the First Army. By the end of the day he had taken up positions along the general line of the CANAL du NORD from PERONNE to YTRES and thence East of HERMIES, INCHY-en-ARTOIS and ECOURT ST. QUENTIN to the SENSÉE East of LECLUSE. On the following day he commenced to withdraw also from the East Bank of the SOMME South of PERONNE, and by the night of the 8th September was holding the general line VERMAND, EPEHY, HAVRINCOURT, and thence along the East bank of the CANAL DU NORD.

The Hindenburg Line. Besides these main features, numerous other trench lines, switch trenches, and communication trenches, for the most part heavily wired, had been constructed at various points to meet local weaknesses or take advantage of local command of fire. At a distance of about 4,000 yards behind the most easterly of these trench lines lies a second double row of trenches known as the BEAUREVOIR-FONSOMME Line, very thoroughly wired and holding numerous concrete shelters and machine gun emplacements. The whole series of defences with the numerous defended villages contained in it, formed a belt of country varying from 7,000 to 10,000 yards in depth, organised by the employment of every available means into a most powerful system, well meriting the great reputation attached to it.

Results of Breaking the Hindenburg Line. The great and critical assaults in which during these nine days of battle the First, Third and Fourth Armies stormed the line of the CANAL du NORD and broke through the Hindenburg Line marked the close of the first phase of the British offensive. The enemy's defence in the last and strongest of his prepared positions had been shattered. The whole of the main Hindenburg defences had passed into our possession, and a wide gap had been driven through such rear trench systems as had existed behind them. The effect of the victory upon the subsequent course of the campaign was decisive. The threat to the enemy's communications was now direct and instant, for nothing, but the natural obstacles of a wooded and well watered countryside lay between our Armies and MAUBEUGE. In the fighting of these days, in which 30 British and 2 American Infantry Divisions, and 1 British Cavalry Division were engaged against 39 German Divisions, over 36,000 prisoners and 380 guns had been captured. Great as were the material losses the enemy had suffered, the effect of so overwhelming defeat upon a moral already deteriorated was of even larger importance.

SECOND PHASE.

Fighting in Open Country. In the first of these stages, the battle of LE CATEAU, certain incomplete defences still held by the enemy were captured, and his troops compelled to evacuate CAMBRAI and fall back behind the line of the SELLE River. In the second stage, the SELLE River was forced and by a development of this operation our front pushed forward to the general line SAMBRE Canal—West edge of the MORMAL Forest—VALENCIENNES, where we were in position for the final assault upon MAUBEUGE. On the 8th October BRANCOURT and PREMONT were taken by the 30th American Division while to the north of them the 66th Division (Major-General H. K. BETHELL), attacking beside the 25th Division (Major-General J. R. E. CHARLES), captured SERAIN. VILLERS OUTREAUX was cleared by the 38th Division, with the assistance of Tanks, after heavy fighting, and late in the afternoon MALINCOURT was captured.

As the result of this attack the enemy's resistance temporarily gave way. His infantry became disorganised and retired steadily eastwards while our airmen reported that the roads converging on LE CATEAU were blocked with troops and transport. Several thousand prisoners and many guns fell into our hands.

By this advance, in which 20 British Infantry 2 British Cavalry and 1 American Infantry Division routed 24 German Divisions and took from them 12,000 prisoners and 250 guns, we gained full possession of the important lateral double line of railway running from ST. QUENTIN through BUSIGNY to CAMBRAI. During the repair of such portions of it as had been destroyed and the removal of delay action mines left by the enemy our line was carried forward by local operations. By the 13th October we had reached the SELLE River at all points South of HASPRES, and had established bridgeheads at a number of places.

Battle of the Selle River. At 2 a.m. on the 20th October an attack upon the line of the SELLE River North of LE CATEAU followed. The troops employed were the 38th, 17th, 5th, 42nd, 62nd, Guards and 19th Divisions of the Third Army and the 4th Division on the right of the First Army in that order from right to left. On this occasion also the enemy's resistance was serious and he had been able to erect wire entanglements along the greater part of the line. Our advance was strongly contested at every point, frequent counter attacks being made. Supported by a number of Tanks which had successfully crossed the River, our Infantry, after severe fighting about NEUVILLY, AMERVAL, SOLESMES, and HASPRES, gained their objectives on the high ground East of the SELLE, pushing our patrols as far as the River HARPIES, North of HASPRES other troops of the First Army continued to make progress on both sides of the SCHELDT Canal reaching the slopes overlooking the left bank of the ECAILLON River and occupied DENAIN.

The capture of the SELLE positions was followed almost immediately by the larger operation for the attainment of the required general line above mentioned running from the SAMBRE Canal along the edge of the MORMAL Forest to the neighbourhood of VALENCIENNES.

In the SELLE Battle the 24 British and 2 American Divisions engaged had captured a further 20,000 prisoners and 475 guns from the 31 German Divisions opposed to them, and had advanced to a great depth with certainty and precision.

Battle of the Sambre. The front of the decisive attack delivered by the Fourth, Third and First Armies on the 4th November extended for a distance of about 30 miles from the SAMBRE, North of the OISY, to VALENCIENNES. The nature of the country across which our advance was to be made was most difficult. In the South the River had to be crossed almost at the outset. In the centre the great Forest of MORMAL, though much depleted by German woodcutting, still presented a formidable obstacle. In the North the fortified town of LE QUESNOY, and several streams which ran parallel to the line of our advance offered frequent opportunities for successful defence. On the other hand, our troops had never been so confident of victory or so assured of their own superiority. After an intense bombardment our troops moved forward to the assault at about dawn, under a most effective artillery

barrage, and very soon had penetrated the enemy's positions on the whole battle front. Throughout the day their pressure was never relaxed and by the evening they had advanced to a depth of five miles, reaching the general line FESMY—LANDRECIES—Centre of FOREST de MORMAL—WARGNIES-le-GRAND—five miles East of VALENCIENNES—ONNAING—SCHELDT Canal opposite THIERS.

The Divisions of the Third Army in the centre of the attack also encountered stiff resistance at first, but when this was overcome made rapid progress. The 38th and 17th Divisions of the Vth Corps under Command of Lieut.-General C. D. SHUTE, pushed far into the Forest of MORMAL. Before dawn on the 5th November the 38th Division had reached the Eastern edge of the Forest, while the 17th Division after sharp fighting about LOCQUIGNOL, had penetrated a mile to the East of that village.

In these operations and their developments 20 British Divisions utterly defeated 32 German Divisions, and captured 19,000 prisoners and more than 450 guns.

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Finally the great series of victories won by the British Forces between the 8th August and the 11th November is the outstanding feature of the events described in this despatch. At AMIENS and BAPAUME, in the breaking of the DROCOURT—QUEANT and HINDENBURG systems, before LE CATEAU and on the SELLE, in FLANDERS and on the SAMBRE, the enemy was again and again brought to battle and defeated.

Royal Engineers. In the course of our advance some 700 road bridges, exclusive of pontoon bridges were constructed. Many of these, and in addition, a large number of foot-bridges for infantry assault, were constructed under heavy shell and Machine gun fire. Notable instances of the cool pluck and determination displayed in this work were furnished by a Field Company of the 38th Division, which in a crossing of the SELLE River lost 50 per cent of its effectives, yet completed its bridge.

This appreciation of the efforts of the 38th (Welsh) Division by the Commander-in-Chief will, I trust, be communicated to all ranks and constitutes a truly glorious record, that should live in our minds for ever, and be a bond of everlasting comradeship in the noble profession of Arms.

T. ASTLEY CUBITT, MAJOR-GENERAL,
Commanding 38th (Welsh) Division.