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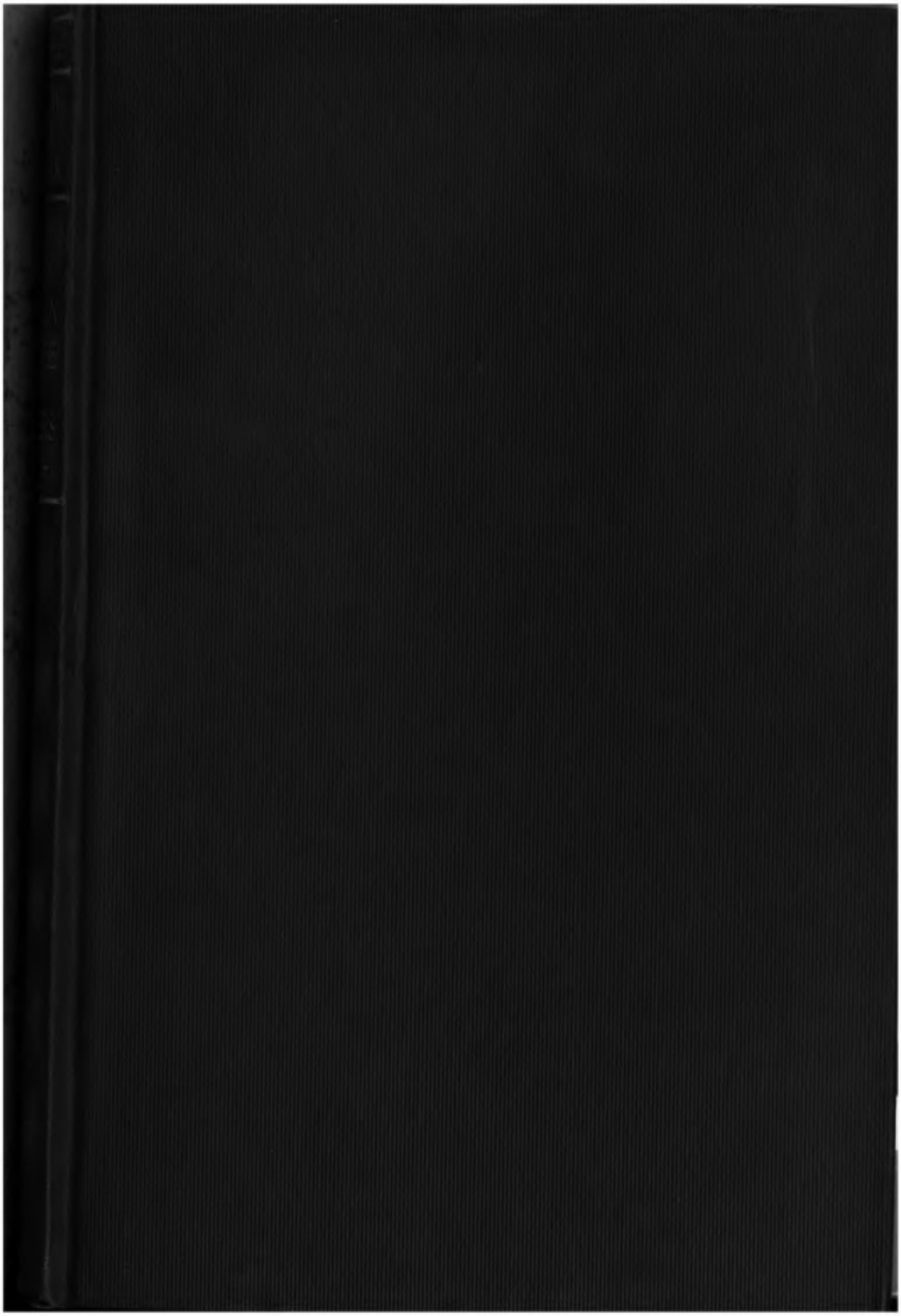

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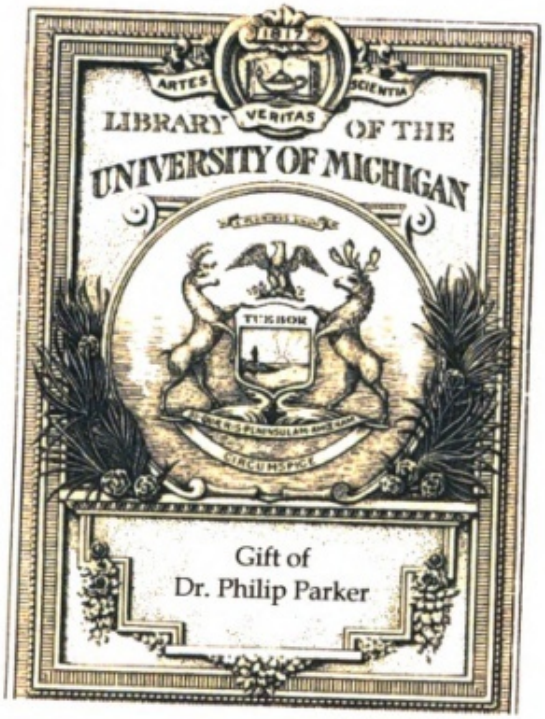

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A HISTORY OF THE GREAT WAR

BY

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

VOLUME THREE

THE BRITISH CAMPAIGN IN FRANCE AND FLANDERS 1916

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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THE BRITISH CAMPAIGN IN FRANCE AND FLANDERS 1916

BY

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

AUTHOR OF "THE GREAT BOER WAR,"
ETC.

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PREFACE

In two previous volumes of this work a narrative has been given of those events which occurred upon the British Western Front during 1914, the year of recoil, and 1915, the year of equilibrium. In this volume will be found the detailed story of 1916, the first of the years of attack and advance.

Time is a great toner down of superlatives, and the episodes which seem world-shaking in our day may, when looked upon by the placid eyes of historical philosophers in days to come, fit more easily into the general scheme of human experience. None the less it can be said without fear of ultimate contradiction that nothing approaching to the Battle of the Somme, with which this volume is mainly concerned, has ever been known in military history, and that it is exceedingly improbable that it will ever be equalled in its length and in its severity. It may be said to have raged with short intermissions, caused by the breaking of the weather, from July 1 to November 14, and during this prolonged period the picked forces of three great nations were locked in close battle. The number of combatants from first to last was between two and three millions, and their united casualties came to the appalling total of at

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least three-quarters of a million. These are minimum figures, but they will give some idea of the unparalleled scale of the operations.

With the increasing number and size of the units employed the scale of the narrative becomes larger. It is more difficult to focus the battalion, while the individual has almost dropped out of sight. Sins of omission are many, and the chronicler can but plead the great difficulty of his task and regret that his limited knowledge may occasionally cause disappointment.

The author should explain that this volume has had to pass through three lines of censors, suffering heavily in the process. It has come out with the loss of all personal names save those of casualties or of high Generals. Some passages also have been excised. On the other hand it is the first which has been permitted to reveal the exact identity of the units engaged. The missing passages and names will be restored when the days of peace return.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

February 3, 1918.

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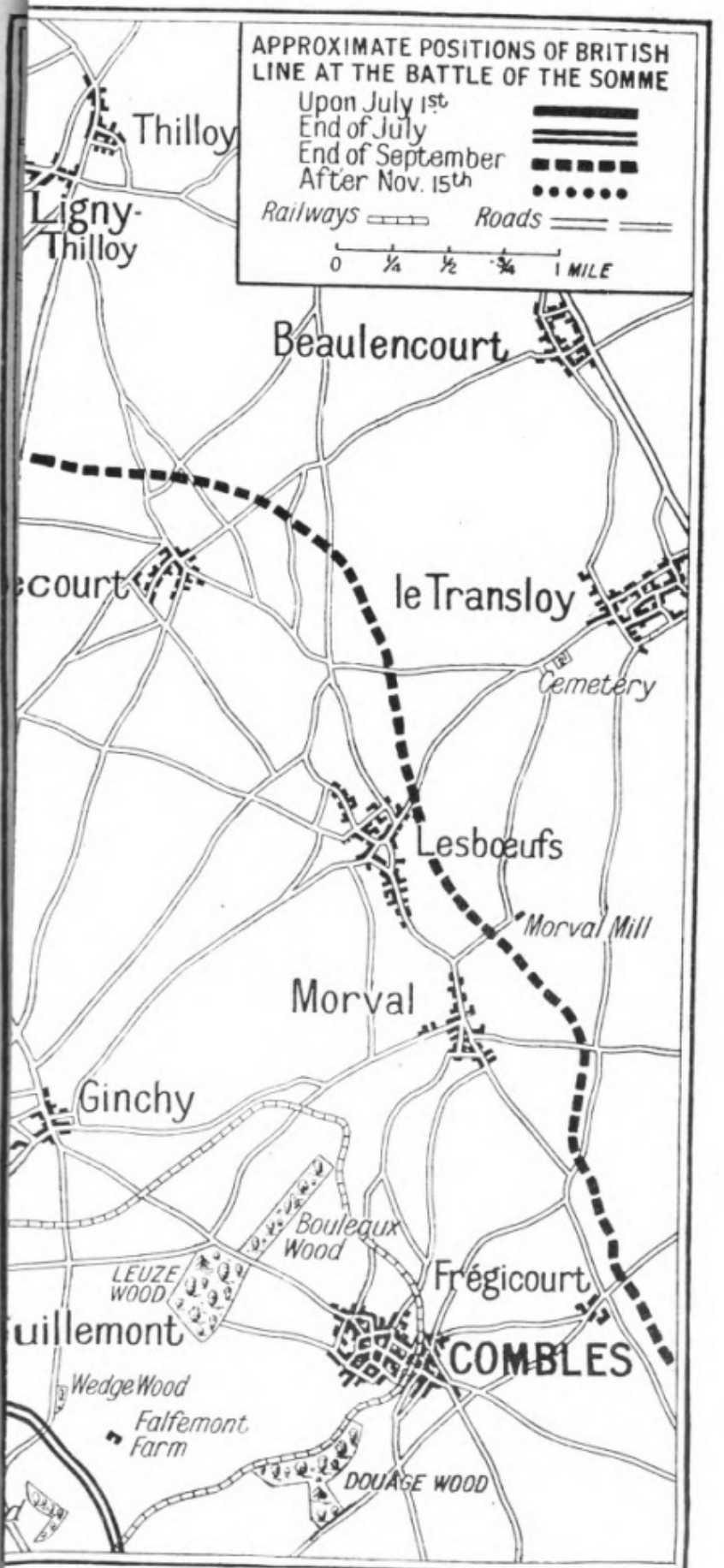

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JANUARY TO JULY 1916

General situation—The fight for the Bluff—The Mound of St. Eloi—Fine performance of Third Division and Canadians—Feat of the 1st Shropshires—Attack on the Irish Division—Fight at Vimy Ridge—Canadian Battle of Ypres—Death of General Mercer—Recovery of lost position—Attack of Thirty-ninth Division—Eve of the Somme.

THE Great War had now come into its second winter—a winter which was marked by an absolute cessation of all serious fighting upon the Western front. Enormous armies were facing each other, but until the German attack upon the French lines of Verdun at the end of February, the infantry of neither side was seriously engaged. There were many raids and skirmishes, with sudden midnight invasions of hostile trenches and rapid returns with booty or prisoners. Both sides indulged in such tactics upon the British front. Gas attacks, too, were occasionally attempted, some on a large scale and with considerable result. The condition of the troops, though it could not fail to be trying, was not so utterly miserable as during the first cold season in the trenches. The British had ceased to be a mere fighting fringe with nothing behind it. The troops were numerous and eager, so that reliefs were frequent. All sorts of devices were adopted for increasing the comfort and conserving the health of the men. Steadily as the winter advanced and the spring ripened into sum-

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mer, fresh divisions were passed over the narrow seas, and the shell-piles at the bases marked the increased energy and output of the workers in the factories. The early summer found everything ready for a renewed attempt upon the German line.

The winter of 1915-16 saw the affairs of the Allies in a condition which could not be called satisfactory, and which would have been intolerable had there not been evident promise of an amendment in the near future. The weakness of the Russians in munitions had caused their gallant but half-armed armies to be driven back until the whole of Poland had fallen into the hands of the Germanic Powers, who had also reconquered Galicia and Bukovina. The British attempt upon Gallipoli, boldly conceived and gallantly urged, but wanting in the essential quality of surprise, had failed with heavy losses and the army had to be withdrawn. Serbia and Montenegro had both been overrun and occupied, while the efficient Bulgarian army had ranged itself with our enemies. The Mesopotamian Expedition had been held up by the Turks, and the brave Townshend, with his depleted division, was hemmed in at Kut, where, after a siege of five months, he was eventually compelled, upon April 26, to lay down his arms, together with 9000 troops, chiefly Indian. When one remembers that on the top of this Germany already held Belgium and a considerable slice of the north of France, which included all the iron and coal-producing centres, it must be admitted that the Berlin Press had some reason upon its side when it insisted that it had already won the War upon paper. To realise that paper, was, however, an operation which was beyond their powers.

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What could the Allies put against these formidable successes? There was the Colonial Empire of Germany. Only one colony, the largest and most powerful, still remained. This was East Africa. General Smuts, a worthy colleague of the noble Botha, had undertaken its reduction, and by the summer the end was in sight. The capture of the colonies would then be complete. The oceans of the world were another asset of the Allies. These also were completely held to the absolute destruction of all German oversea commerce. These two conquests, and the power of blockade which steadily grew more stringent, were all that the Allies could throw into the other scale, save for the small corner of Alsace still held by the French, the southern end of Mesopotamia, and the port of Salonica, which was a strategic checkmate to the southern advance of the Germans. The balance seemed all against them. There was no discouragement, however, for all these difficulties had been discounted and the Allies had always recognised that their strength lay in those reserves which had not yet had time to develop. The opening of the summer campaign of 1916, with the capture of Erzeroum, the invasion of Armenia, and the reconquest of Bukovina, showed that the Russian army had at last found its second wind. The French had already done splendid work in their classical resistance at Verdun, which had extended from the last weeks of February onwards, and had cost the Germans over a quarter of a million of casualties. The opening of the British campaign in July found the whole army most eager to emulate the deeds of its Allies, and especially to take some of the weight from the splendid defenders of Verdun. Their fight

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against very heavy odds in men, munitions, and transport, was one of the greatest deeds of arms, possibly the greatest deed of arms of the war. It was known, however, before July that a diversion was absolutely necessary, and although the British had taken over a fresh stretch of trenches so as to release French reinforcements, some more active help was imperatively called for.

Before describing the summer campaign it is necessary to glance back at the proceedings of the winter and spring upon the British line, and to comment upon one or two matters behind that line which had a direct influence upon the campaign. Of the minor operations to which allusion has already been made, there are none between the Battle of Loos and the middle of February 1916 which call for particular treatment. Those skirmishes and mutual raidings which took place during that time centred largely round the old salient at Ypres and the new one at Loos, though the lines at Armentières were also the scene of a good deal of activity. One considerable attack seems to have been planned by the Germans on the north-east of Ypres in the Christmas week of 1915—an attack which was preceded by a formidable gas attack. The British artillery was so powerful, however, that it crushed the advance in the trenches, where the gathered bayonets of the stormers could be seen going down before the scourging shrapnel like rushes before a gale. The infantry never emerged, and the losses must have been very heavy. This was the only considerable attempt made by either side during the winter.

At the time of Lord French's return another change was made at home which had a very imme-

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diate bearing upon the direction of the War. Britain had suffered greatly from the fact that at the beginning of hostilities the distinguished officers who composed the central staff had all been called away for service in the field. Lord Kitchener had done wonders in filling their place, but it was impossible for any man, however great his abilities or energy, to carry such a burden upon his shoulders. The more conscientious the man the more he desires to supervise everything himself and the more danger there is that all the field cannot be covered. Already the recruiting service, which had absorbed a great deal of Lord Kitchener's energies with most splendid results, had been relegated to Lord Derby, whose tact and wisdom produced fresh armies of volunteers. Now the immediate direction of the War and the supervision of all that pertained to the armies in the field was handed over to Sir William Robertson, a man of great organising ability and of proved energy. From this time onwards his character and judgment bulked larger and larger as one of the factors which made for the success of the Allies.

In January 1916 Britain gave her last proof of the resolution with which she was waging war. Already she had shown that no question of money could diminish her ardour, for she was imposing direct taxation upon her citizens with a vigour which formed the only solid basis for the credit of the Allies. Neither our foes nor our friends have shown such absolute readiness to pay in hard present cash, that posterity might walk with a straighter back, and many a man was paying a good half of his income to the State. But now a sacrifice more intimate

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than that of money had to be made. It was of that personal liberty which is as the very breath of our nostrils. This also was thrown with a sigh into the common cause, and a Military Service Bill was passed by which every citizen from 19 to 41 was liable to be called up. It is questionable whether it was necessary as yet as a military measure, since the enormous number of 5,000,000 volunteers had come forward, but as an act of justice by which the burden should be equally distributed, and the shirker compelled to his duty, it was possible to justify this radical departure from the customs of our fathers and the instincts of our race. Many who acquiesced in its necessity did so with a heavy heart, feeling how glorious would have been our record had it been possible to bring forward by the stress of duty alone the manhood of the nation. As a matter of fact, the margin left over was neither numerous nor important, but the energies of the authorities were now released from the incessant strain which the recruiting service had caused.

The work of the trenches was made easier for the British by the fact that they had at last reached an equality with, and in many cases a superiority to, their enemy, in the number of their guns, the quantity of their munitions, and the provision of those smaller weapons such as trench mortars and machine-guns which count for so much in this description of warfare. Their air supremacy which had existed for a long time was threatened during some months by the Fokker machines of the Germans, and by the skill with which their aviators used them, but faster models from England soon restored the balance. There had been a time also when the sys-

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tem and the telescopic sights of the German snipers had given them an ascendancy. Thanks to the labours of various enthusiasts for the rifle, this matter was set right and there were long stretches of the line where no German head could for an instant be shown above the parapet. The Canadian sector was particularly free from any snipers save their own.

The first serious operation of the spring of 1916 upon the British line was a determined German attack upon that section which lies between the Ypres-Comines Canal and the Ypres-Comines railway on the extreme south of the Ypres salient; Hill 60 lies to the north of it. In the line of trenches there was one small artificial elevation, not more than thirty feet above the plain. This was called the Bluff, and was the centre of the attack. It was of very great importance as a point of artillery observation. During the whole of February 13 the bombardment was very severe, and losses were heavy along a front of several miles, the right of which was held by the Seventeenth Division, the centre by the Fiftieth, and the left by the Twenty-fourth. Finally, after many of the trenches had been reduced to dirt heaps five mines were simultaneously sprung under the British front line, each of them of great power. The explosions were instantly followed by a rush of the German infantry. In the neighbourhood of the Bluff, the garrison, consisting at that point of the 10th Lancashire Fusiliers, were nearly all buried or killed. To the north lay the 10th Sherwood Foresters and north of them the 8th South Staffords, whose Colonel, though four times wounded, continued to direct the defence. It was impossible, however, to hold the whole line, as the Germans had seized

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the Bluff and were able to enfilade all the trenches of the Sherwoods, who lost twelve officers and several hundred men before they would admit that their position was untenable. The South Staffords being further off were able to hold on, but the whole front from their right to the canal south of the Bluff was in the hands of the Germans, who had very rapidly and skilfully consolidated it. A strong counter-attack by the 7th Lincolns and 7th Borders, in which the survivors of the Lancashire Fusiliers took part, had some success, but was unable to permanently regain the lost sector, six hundred yards of which remained with the enemy. A lieutenant, with 40 bombers of the Lincolns, 38 of whom fell, did heroic work.

The attack had extended to the north, where it had fallen upon the Fiftieth Division, and to the Twenty-fourth Division upon the left of it. Here it was held and eventually repulsed. Of the company of the 9th Sussex who held the extreme left of the line, a large portion were blown up by a mine and forty were actually buried in the crater. Young Lieutenant McNair, however, the officer in charge, showed great energy and presence of mind. He held the Germans from the crater and with the help of another officer, who had rushed up some supports, drove them back to their trenches. For this McNair received his Victoria Cross. The 3rd Rifle Brigade, a veteran regular battalion, upon the right of the Sussex, had also put up a vigorous resistance, as had the central Fiftieth Division, so that in spite of the sudden severity of the attack it was only at the one point of the Bluff that the enemy had made a lodgment—that point being the real centre of their effort.

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They held on strongly to their new possession, and a vigorous fire with several partial attacks during the next fortnight failed to dislodge them.

Early in March the matter was taken seriously in hand, for the position was a most important one, and a further advance at this point would have involved the safety of Ypres. The Seventeenth Division still held the supporting trenches, and these now became the starting-point for the attack. A considerable artillery concentration was effected, two brigades of guns and two companies of sappers were brought up from the Third Division, and the 76th Brigade of the same Division came up from St. Omer, where it had been resting, in order to carry out the assault. The general commanding this brigade was in immediate command of the operations.

The problem was a most difficult one, as the canal to the south and a marsh upon the north screened the flanks of the new German position, while its front was covered by shell-holes which the tempestuous weather had filled with water. There was nothing for it, however, but a frontal attack, and this was carried out with very great gallantry upon March 2, at 4.30 in the morning. The infantry left their trenches in the dark and crept forward undiscovered, dashing into the enemy's line with the first grey glimmer of the dawn. The right of the attack formed by the 2nd Suffolks had their revenge for Le Cateau, for they carried the Bluff itself with a rush. So far forward did they get that a number of Germans emerged from dug-outs in their rear, and were organising a dangerous attack when they were pelted back into their holes by a bombing party. Beyond the Bluff the Suffolks were faced by six deep shel-

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ters for machine-guns, which held them for a time but were eventually captured. The centre battalion consisted of the 8th Royal Lancasters, who lost heavily from rifle fire but charged home with great determination, flooding over the old German front line and their support trenches as well as their immediate objective. The left battalion in the attack were the 1st Gordon Highlanders, who had a most difficult task, being exposed to the heaviest fire of all. For a moment they were hung up, and then with splendid spirit threw themselves at the hostile trenches again and carried everything before them. They were much helped in this second attack by the supporting battalion, the 7th Lincolns, whose bombers rushed to the front. The 10th Welsh Fusiliers, who were supporting on the right, also did invaluable service by helping to consolidate the Bluff, while the 9th West Ridings on the left held the British front line and repulsed an attempt at a flanking counter-attack.

In spite of several counter-attacks and a very severe bombardment the line now held firm, and the Germans seem to have abandoned all future designs upon this section. They had lost very heavily in the assault, and 250 men with 5 officers remained in the hands of the victors. Some of the German trench taken was found to be untenable, but the 12th West Yorkshires of the 8th Brigade connected up the new position with the old and the salient was held. So ended a well-managed and most successful little fight. Great credit was due to a certain officer, who passed through the terrible German barrage again and again to link up the troops with headquarters. Extreme gallantry was shown

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also by the brigade-runners, many of whom lost their lives in the all-important work of preserving communications.

Students of armour in the future may be interested to note that this was the first engagement in which British infantry reverted after a hiatus of more than two centuries to the use of helmets. Dints of shrapnel upon their surfaces proved in many cases that they had been the salvation of their wearers. Several observers have argued that trench warfare implies a special trench equipment, entirely different from that for surface operations.

In the middle of March the pressure upon the French at Verdun had become severe, and it was determined to take over a fresh section of line so as to relieve troops for the north-eastern frontier. General Foch's Tenth Army, which had held the sector opposite to Souchez and Lorette, was accordingly drawn out, and twelve miles were added to the British front. From this time forward there were four British armies, the Second (Plumer) in the Ypres district, the First (Monro) opposite to Neuve Chapelle, the Third (Allenby) covering the new French sector down to Arras, the Fourth (Rawlinson) from Albert to the Somme.

A brisk skirmish which occurred in the south about this period is worthy of mention—typical of many smaller affairs the due record of which would swell this chapter to a portentous length. In this particular instance, a very sudden and severe night attack was directed by the Germans against a post held by the 8th East Surreys of the Eighteenth Division at the points where the British and French lines meet just north of the Somme. This small

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stronghold, known as Ducks' Post, was at the head of a causeway across a considerable marsh, and possessed a strategic importance out of all proportion to its size. A violent bombardment in the darkness of the early morning of March 20 was followed by an infantry advance, pushed well home. It was an unnerving experience. "As the Huns charged," says one who was present, "they made the most hellish screaming row I ever heard." The Surrey men under the lead of a young subaltern stood fast, and were reinforced by two platoons. Not only did they hold up the attack, but with the early dawn they advanced in turn, driving the Germans back into their trenches and capturing a number of prisoners. The post was strengthened and was firmly held.

The next episode which claims attention is the prolonged and severe fighting which took place from March 27 onwards at St. Eloi, the scene of so fierce a contest just one year before. A small salient had been formed by the German line at this point ever since its capture, and on this salient was the rising known as the Mount (not to be confounded with the Bluff), insignificant in itself since it was only twenty or thirty feet high, but of importance in a war where artillery observation is the very essence of all operations. It stood just east of the little village of St. Eloi. This place was known to be very strongly held, so the task of attacking it was handed over to the Third Division, which had already shown at the Bluff that they were adepts at such an attack. After several weeks of energetic preparation, five mines were ready with charges which were so heavy that in one instance 30,000 pounds of ammonal were

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employed. The assault was ordered for 4.15 in the morning of March 27. It was known to be a desperate enterprise and was entrusted to two veteran battalions of regular troops, the 4th Royal Fusiliers and the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers. A frontal attack was impossible, so it was arranged that the Royals should sweep around the left flank and the Northumberlands the right, while the remaining battalions of the 9th Brigade, the 12th West Yorks and 1st Scots Fusiliers, should be in close support in the centre. At the appointed hour the mines were exploded with deadly effect, and in the pitch darkness of a cloudy rainy morning the two battalions sprang resolutely forward upon their dangerous venture. The trenches on each flank were carried and 5 officers with 193 men of the 18th Reserve Jaeger fell into our hands. As usual, however, it was the retention of the captured position which was the more difficult and costly part of the operation. The Northumberlands had won their way round on the right, but the Fusiliers had been partially held up on the left, so that the position was in some ways difficult and irregular. The guns of the Third Division threw forward so fine a barrage that no German counter-attack could get forward, but all day their fire was very heavy and deadly upon the captured trenches, and also upon the two battalions in support. On the night of the 27th the 9th Brigade was drawn out and the 8th took over the new line, all access to it being impossible save in the darkness, as no communication trenches existed. The situation was complicated by the fact that although the British troops had on the right won their way to the rear of the craters, one of these still contained a Ger-

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man detachment, who held on in a most heroic fashion and could not be dislodged. On March 30 the situation was still unchanged, and the 76th Brigade was put in to relieve the 8th. The 1st Gordons were now in the line, very wet and weary, but declaring that they would hold the ground at all costs. It was clear that the British line must be extended and that the gallant Germans in the crater must be overwhelmed. For this purpose, upon the night of April 2, the 8th Royal Lancasters swept across the whole debatable ground, with the result that 4 officers and 80 men surrendered at daylight to the Brigade-Major and a few men who summoned them from the lip of the crater. The Divisional General had himself gone forward to see that the captured ground was made good. "We saw our Divisional General mid-thigh in water and splashing down the trenches," says an observer. "I can tell you it put heart into our weary men." So ended the arduous labours of the Third Division, who upon April 4 handed over the ground to the 2nd Canadians.

The episode of the St. Eloi craters was, however, far from being at an end. The position was looked upon as of great importance by the Germans, apart from the artillery observation, for their whole aim was the contraction, as that of the British was the expansion, of the space contained in the Ypres salient. "Elbow room! More elbow room!" was the hearts' cry of Plumer's Second Army. But the enemy grudged every yard, and with great tenacity began a series of counter-attacks which lasted with varying fortunes for several weeks.

Hardly had the Third Division filed out of the trenches when the German bombers were buzzing

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and stinging all down the new line, and there were evident signs of an impending counter-attack. Upon April 6 it broke with great violence, beginning with a blasting storm of shells followed by a rush of infantry in that darkest hour which precedes the dawn. It was a very terrible ordeal for troops which had up to then seen no severe service, and for the moment they were overborne. The attack chanced to come at the very moment when the 27th Winnipeg Regiment was being relieved by the 29th Vancouvers, which increased the losses and the confusion. The craters were taken by the German stormers with 180 prisoners, but the trench line was still held. The 31st Alberta Battalion upon the left of the position was involved in the fight and drove back several assaults, while a small French Canadian machine-gun detachment from the 22nd Regiment distinguished itself by an heroic resistance in which it was almost destroyed. About noon the bombardment was so terrific that the front trench was temporarily abandoned, the handful of survivors falling back upon the supports. The 31st upon the left were still able to maintain themselves, however, and after dusk they were able to reoccupy three out of the five craters in front of the line. From this time onwards the battle resolved itself into a desperate struggle between the opposing craters. During the whole of April 7 it was carried on with heavy losses to both parties. On one occasion a platoon of 40 Germans in close formation were shot down to a man as they rushed forward in a gallant forlorn hope. For three days the struggle went on, at the end of which time four of the craters were still held by the Canadians. Two medical men particularly distinguished

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themselves by their constant passage across the open space which divided the craters from the trench. The consolidation of the difficult position was admirably carried out by the C.R.E. of the Second Canadian Division.

The Canadians were left in comparative peace for ten days, but on April 19 there was a renewed burst of activity. Upon this day the Germans bombarded heavily, and then attacked with their infantry at four different points of the Ypres salient. At two they were entirely repulsed. On the Ypres-Langemarck road on the extreme north of the British position they remained in possession of about a hundred yards of trench. Finally, in the crater region they won back two, including the more important one which was on the Mount. Night after night there were bombing attacks in this region, by which the Germans endeavoured to enlarge their gains. New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were now opposed to them and showed the same determination as the men of the West. The sector held by the veteran First Canadian Division was also attacked, the 13th Battalion having 100 casualties and the Canadian Scots 50. Altogether this fighting had been so incessant and severe, although as a rule confined to a very small front, that on an average 1000 casualties a week were recorded in the corps. The fighting was carried on frequently in heavy rain, and the disputed craters became deep pools of mud in which men fought waist deep, and where it was impossible to keep rifle or machine-gun from being fouled and clogged. Several of the smaller craters were found to be untenable by either side, and were abandoned to the corpses which lay in the mire.

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The Germans did not long remain in possession of the trench which they had captured upon the 19th in the Langemarck direction. Though it was almost unapproachable on account of the deep mud, a storming column of the 1st Shropshires waded out to it in the dark up to their waists in slush, and turned the enemy out with the point of the bayonet. Upon April the 21st the line was completely re-established, though a sapper is reported to have declared that it was impossible to consolidate porridge. In this brilliant affair the Shropshires lost a number of officers and men, including their gallant Colonel, Luard, and Lieutenant Johnstone, who was shot by a sniper while boldly directing the consolidation from outside the parapet without cover of any kind. The whole incident was an extraordinarily fine feat of arms which could only have been carried out by a highly disciplined and determined body of men. The mud was so deep that men were engulfed and suffocated, and the main body had to throw themselves down and distribute their weight to prevent being sucked down into the quagmire. The rifles were so covered and clogged that all shooting was out of the question and only bombs and bayonets were available for the assault. The old 53rd never did a better day's work.

During the whole winter the Loos salient had been simmering, as it had never ceased to do since the first tremendous convulsion which had established it. In the early part of the year it was held by cavalry brigades, taking turns in succession, and during this time there was a deceptive quiet, which was due to the fact that the Germans were busy in running a number of mines under the position. At

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the end of February the Twelfth Division took over the north of the section, and for ten weeks they found themselves engaged in a struggle which can only be described as hellish. How constant and severe it was may be gauged from the fact that without any real action they lost 4000 men during that period. As soon as they understood the state of affairs, which was only conveyed to them by several devastating explosions, they began to run their own mines and to raid those of their enemy. It was a nightmare conflict, half above ground, half below, and sometimes both simultaneously, so that men may be said to have fought in layers. The upshot of the matter, after ten weeks of fighting, was that the British positions were held at all points, though reduced to an extraordinary medley of craters and fissures, which some observer has compared to a landscape in the moon. The First Division shared with the Twelfth the winter honours of the dangerous Loos salient.

On April 27 a considerable surface attack developed on this part of the line, now held by the Sixteenth Irish Division. Early upon that day the Germans, taking advantage of the wind, which was now becoming almost as important in a land as it had once been in a sea-battle, loosed a cloud of poison upon the trenches just south of Hulluch and followed it up by a rush of infantry which got possession of part of the front and support lines in the old region of the chalk-pit wood. The 49th Brigade was in the trenches. This Brigade consisted of the 7th and 8th Inniskillings, with the 7th and 8th Royal Irish. It was upon the first two battalions that the cloud of gas descended, which seems to have been of a par-

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ticularly deadly brew, since it poisoned horses upon the roads far to the rear. Many of the men were stupefied and few were in a condition for resistance when the enemy rushed to the trenches. Two battalions of Dublin Fusiliers, however, from the 48th Brigade were in the adjoining trenches and were not affected by the poison. These, together with the 8th Inniskillings, who were in the rear of the 7th, attacked the captured trench and speedily won it back. This was the more easy as there had been a sudden shift of wind which had blown the vile stuff back into the faces of the German infantry. A Bavarian letter taken some days later complained bitterly of their losses, which were stated to have reached 1300 from poison alone. The casualties of the Irish Division were about 1500, nearly all from gas, or shell-fire. Coming as it did at the moment when the tragic and futile rebellion in Dublin had seemed to place the imagined interests of Ireland in front of those of European civilisation, this success was most happily timed. The brunt of the fighting was borne equally by troops from the north and from the south of Ireland—a happy omen, we will hope, for the future.

Amongst the other local engagements which broke the monotony of trench life may be mentioned one upon May 11 near the Hohenzollern Redoubt where the Germans held for a short time a British trench, taking 127 of the occupants prisoners. More serious was the fighting upon the Vimy Ridge south of Souchez on May 15. About 7.30 on the evening of that day the British exploded a series of mines which, either by accident or design, were short of the German trenches. The sector was occupied by

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the Twenty-fifth Division, and the infantry attack was entrusted to the 11th Lancashire Fusiliers and the 9th North Lancashires, both of the 74th Brigade. They rushed forward with great dash and occupied the newly-formed craters, where they established themselves firmly, joining them up with each other and cutting communications backwards so as to make a new observation trench.

The Twenty-fifth Division lay at this time with the Forty-seventh London Division as its northern neighbour, the one forming the left-hand unit of the Third Army, and the other the extreme right of the First. Upon the 19th the Londoners took over the new position from the 74th, and found it to be an evil inheritance, for upon May 21, when they were in the very act of relieving the 7th and 75th Brigades, which formed the front of the Twenty-fifth Division, they were driven in by a terrific bombardment and assault from the German lines. On the front of a brigade the Germans captured not only the new ground won but our own front line and part of our supporting line. Old soldiers declared that the fire upon this occasion was among the most concentrated and deadly of the whole War. With the new weapons artillery is not needed at such short range, for with aerial torpedoes the same effect can be produced as with guns of a great calibre.

In the early morning of April 30, there was a strong attack by the Germans at Wulverghem, which was the village to the west of Messines, to which our line had been shifted after the attack of November 2, 1914. There is no doubt that all this bustling upon the part of the Germans was partly for the purpose of holding us to our ground while they dealt with the

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French at Verdun, and partly to provoke a premature offensive, since they well knew that some great movement was in contemplation. As a matter of fact, all the attacks, including the final severe one upon the Canadian lines, were dealt with by local defenders and had no strategic effect at all. In the case of the Wulverghem attack it was preceded by an emission of gas of such intensity that it produced much sickness as far off as Bailleul, at least six miles to the west. Horses in the distant horse lines fell senseless under the noxious vapour. It came on with such rapidity that about a hundred men of the Twenty-fourth Division were overcome before they could get on their helmets. The rest were armed against it, and repelled the subsequent infantry attacks carried out by numerous small bodies of exploring infantry, without any difficulty. The whole casualties of the Fifth Corps, whose front was attacked, amounted to 400, half by gas and half by the shells.

In May, General Alderson, who had commanded the Canadians with such success from the beginning, took over new duties and gave place to General Sir Julian Byng, the gallant commander of the Third Cavalry Division.

Upon June 2 there began an action upon the Canadian front at Ypres which led to severe fighting extending over several weeks, and put a very heavy strain upon a corps the First Division of which had done magnificent work during more than a year, whilst the other two divisions had only just eased up after the fighting of the craters. Knowing well that the Allies were about to attack, the Germans were exceedingly anxious to gain some success which

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would compel them to disarrange their plans and to suspend that concentration of troops and guns which must precede any great effort. In searching for such a success it was natural that they should revert to the Ypres salient, which had always been the weakest portion of the line—so weak, indeed, that when it is seen outlined by the star shells at night, it seems to the spectator to be almost untenable, since the curve of the German line was such that it could command the rear of all the British trenches. It was a region of ruined cottages, shallow trenches commanded by the enemy's guns, and shell-swept woods so shattered and scarred that they no longer furnished any cover. These woods, Zouave Wood, Sanctuary Wood, and others lie some hundred yards behind the front trenches and form a rallying-point for those who retire, and a place of assembly for those who advance.

The Canadian front was from four to five miles long, following the line of the trenches. The extreme left lay upon the ruined village of Hooge. This part of the line was held by the Royal Canadian Regiment. For a mile to their right, in front of Zouave and Sanctuary Woods, the Princess Patricia's held the line over low-lying ground. In immediate support was the 49th Regiment. These all belonged to the 7th Canadian Brigade. This formed the left or northern sector of the position.

In the centre was a low hill called Mount Sorel, in which the front trenches were located. Immediately in its rear is another elevation, somewhat higher, and used as an observing station. This was Observatory Hill. A wood, Armagh Wood, covered the slope of this hill. There are about two hundred

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yards of valley between Mount Sorel and Observatory Hill, with a small stream running down it. This section of the line was essential for the British, since in the hands of the enemy it would command all the rest. It was garrisoned by the 8th Brigade, consisting of Canadian Mounted Rifles.

The right of the Canadian line, including St. Eloi upon the extreme limit of their sector, was held by troops of the Second Canadian Division. This part of the line was not involved in the coming attack. It broke upon the centre and the left, the Mount Sorel and the Hooge positions.

The whole operation was very much more important than was appreciated by the British public at the time, and formed a notable example of anticipatory tactics upon the part of the German General Staff. Just as they had delayed the advance upon the west by their furious assault upon Verdun on the east, so they now calculated that by a fierce attack upon the north of the British line they might disperse the gathering storm which was visibly banking up in the Somme Valley. It was a bold move, boldly carried out, and within appreciable distance of success.

Their first care was to collect and concentrate a great number of guns and mine-throwers on the sector to be attacked. This concentration occurred at the very moment when our own heavy artillery was in a transition stage, some of it going south to the Somme. Hardly a gun had sounded all morning. Then in an instant with a crash and a roar several mines were sprung under the trenches, and a terrific avalanche of shells came smashing down among the astounded men. It is doubtful if a more hellish

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storm of projectiles of every sort had ever up to that time been concentrated upon so limited a front. There was death from the mines below, death from the shells above, chaos and destruction all around. The men were dazed and the trenches both in front and those of communication were torn to pieces and left as heaps of rubble.

One great mine destroyed the loop of line held by the Princess Patricia's and buried a company in the ruins. A second exploded at Mount Sorel and did great damage. At the first outburst Generals Mercer and Williams had been hurried into a small tunnel out of the front line, but the mine explosion obliterated the mouth of the tunnel and they were only extricated with difficulty. General Mercer was last seen encouraging the men, but he had disappeared after the action and his fate was unknown to friend or foe until ten days later his body was found with both legs broken in one of the side trenches. He died as he had lived, a very gallant soldier. For four hours the men cowered down in what was left of the trenches, awaiting the inevitable infantry attack which would come from the German lines fifty yards away. When at last it came it met with little resistance, for there were few to resist. Those few were beaten down by the rush of the Wurtembergers who formed the attacking division. They carried the British line for a length of nearly a mile, from Mount Sorel to the south of Hooge, and they captured about 500 men, a large proportion of whom were wounded. General Williams, Colonel Usher, and twelve other officers were taken.

When the German stormers saw the havoc in the trenches they may well have thought that they had

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only to push forward to pierce the line and close their hands at last upon the coveted Ypres. If any such expectation was theirs, they must have been new troops who had no knowledge of the dour tenacity of the Canadians. The men who first faced poison gas without masks were not so lightly driven. The German attack was brought to a standstill by the withering rifle-fire from the woods, and though the assailants were still able to hold the ground occupied they were unable to increase their gains, while in spite of a terrific barrage of shrapnel fresh Canadian battalions, the 14th and 15th from the 3rd Canadian Brigade, were coming up from the rear to help their exhausted companions.

The evening of June 2 was spent in confused skirmishing, the advanced patrols of the Germans getting into the woods and being held up by the Canadian infantry moving up to the front. Some German patrols are said to have got as far as Zillebeke village, three-quarters of a mile in advance of their old line. By the morning of June 3 these intruders had been pushed back, but a counter-attack before dawn by the 9th Brigade was held up by artillery fire, Colonel Hay of the 52nd (New Ontario) Regiment and many officers and men being put out of action. The British guns were now hard at work, and the Wurtembergers in the captured trenches were enduring something of what the Canadians had undergone the day before. About 7 o'clock the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Brigades, veterans of Ypres, began to advance, making their way through the woods and over the bodies of the German skirmishers. When the advance got in touch with the captured trenches it was held up, for the Wurtembergers

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stood to it like men, and were well supported by their gunners. On the right the 7th and 10th Canadians got well forward, but had not enough weight for a serious attack. It became clear that a premature counter-attack might lead to increased losses and that the true method was to possess one's soul in patience until the preparation could be made for a decisive operation. The impatience and ardour of the men were very great, and their courage had a fine edge put upon it by a churlish German official communiqué, adding one more disgrace to their military annals, which asserted that more Canadian prisoners had not been taken because they had fled so fast. Canadians could smile at the insult, but it was the sort of smile that is more menacing than a frown. The infantry waited grimly while some of the missing guns were recalled into their position. Up to this time the losses had been about 80 officers and 2000 men.

The weather was vile, with incessant rain which turned the fields into bogs and the trenches into canals. For a few days things were at a standstill, for the clouds prevented aeroplane reconnaissance and the registration of the guns. The Corps lay in front of its lost trenches like a wounded bear, looking across with red eyes at its stolen cub. The Germans had taken advantage of the lull to extend their line, and on June 6 they had occupied the ruins of Hooge, which were impossible to hold after all the trenches to the south had been lost. In their new line the Germans awaited the attack which they afterwards admitted that they knew to be inevitable. The British gunfire was so severe that it was very difficult for them to improve their new position.

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On the 13th the weather had moderated and all was ready for the counter-attack. It was carried out at two in the morning by two composite brigades. The 3rd (Toronto) and 7th Battalions led upon the right, while the 13th (Royal Highlanders) and 16th (Canadian Scots) were in the van of the left, with their pipers skirling in front of them. Machine-guns supported the whole advance. The right flank of the advance, being exposed to the German machine-guns, was shrouded by the smoke of 200 bombs. The night was a very dark one and the Canadian Scots had taken advantage of it to get beyond the front line, and, as it proved, inside the German barrage zone, so that heavy as it was it did them no scathe. The new German line was carried with a magnificent rush, and a second heave lifted the wave of stormers into the old British trenches—or the place where they had been. Nine machine-guns and 150 prisoners from the 119th, 120th, 125th, and 127th Wurtemberg Regiments were captured. To their great joy the Canadians discovered that such munitions as they had abandoned upon June 2 were still in the trenches and reverted into their hands. It is pleasant to add that evidence was found that the Wurtembergers had behaved with humanity towards the wounded. From this time onwards the whole Canadian area from close to Hooge (the village still remained with the enemy) across the front of the woods, over Mount Sorel, and on to Hill 60, was consolidated and maintained. Save the heavy reciprocal losses neither side had anything to show for all their desperate fighting, save that the ruins of Hooge were now German. The Canadian losses in the total operations came to about 7000 men—a figure which

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is eloquent as to the severity of the fighting. They emerged from the ordeal with their military reputation more firmly established than ever. Ypres will surely be a place of pilgrimage for Canadians in days to come, for the ground upon the north of the city and also upon the south-east is imperishably associated with the martial traditions of their country. The battle just described is the most severe action between the epic of Loos upon the one side, and that tremendous episode in the south, upon the edge of which we are now standing.

There is one other happening of note which may in truth be taken as an overture of that gigantic performance. This was the action of the Seventeenth Corps upon June 30, the eve of the Somme battle, in which the Thirty-ninth Division, supported by guns from the Thirty-fifth and Fifty-first Divisions upon each side of it, attacked the German trenches near Richebourg at a spot known as the Boar's Head. The attack was so limited in the troops employed and so local in area that it can only be regarded as a feint to take the German attention from the spot where the real danger was brewing.

After an artillery preparation of considerable intensity, the infantry assault was delivered by the 12th and 13th Royal Sussex of the 116th Brigade. The scheme was that they should advance in three waves and win their way to the enemy support line, which they were to convert into the British front line, while the divisional pioneer battalion, the 13th Gloster, was to join it up to the existing system by new communication trenches. For some reason, however, a period of eleven hours seems to have elapsed between the first bombardment and the ac-

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tual attack. The latter was delivered at three in the morning after a fresh bombardment of only ten minutes. So ready were the Germans that an observer has remarked that had a string been tied from the British batteries to the German the opening could not have been more simultaneous, and they had brought together a great weight of metal. Every kind of high explosive, shrapnel, and trench mortar bombs rained on the front and support line, the communication trenches and No Man's Land, in addition to a most hellish fire of machine-guns. The infantry none the less advanced with magnificent ardour, though with heavy losses. On occupying the German front line trenches there was ample evidence that the guns had done their work well, for the occupants were lying in heaps. The survivors threw bombs to the last moment, and then cried, "Kamerad!" Few of them were taken back. Two successive lines were captured, but the losses were too heavy to allow them to be held, and the troops had eventually under heavy shell-fire to fall back on their own front lines. Only three officers came back unhurt out of the two battalions, and the losses of rank and file came to a full two-thirds of the number engaged. "The men were magnificent," says one who led them, but they learned the lesson which was awaiting so many of their comrades in the south, that all human bravery cannot overcome conditions which are essentially impossible. A heavy German bombardment continued for some time, flattening out the trenches and inflicting losses, not only upon the 39th but upon the 51st Highland Territorial Division. This show of heavy artillery may be taken as the most pleasant feature in the whole episode, since it

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shows that its object was attained at least to the very important extent of holding up the German guns. Those heavy batteries upon the Somme might well have modified our successes of the morrow.

A second attack made with the same object of distracting the attention of the Germans and holding up their guns was made at an earlier date at a point called the triangle opposite to the Double Crassier near Loos. This attack was started at 9.10 upon the evening of June 10, and was carried out in a most valiant fashion by the 2nd Rifles and part of the 2nd Royal Sussex, both of the 2nd Brigade. There can be no greater trial for troops, and no greater sacrifice can be demanded of a soldier, than to risk and probably lose his life in an attempt which can obviously have no permanent result, and is merely intended to ease pressure elsewhere. The gallant stormers reached and in several places carried the enemy's line, but no lasting occupation could be effected, and they had eventually to return to their own line. The Riflemen, who were the chief sufferers, lost 11 officers and 200 men.

A word should be said as to the raids along the line of the German trenches by which it was hoped to distract their attention from the point of attack, and also to obtain precise information as to the disposition of their units. It is difficult to say whether the British were the gainers or the losers on balance in these raids, for some were successful, while some were repelled. Among a great number of gallant attempts, the details of which hardly come within the scale of this chronicle, the most successful perhaps were two made by the 9th Highland Light Infantry and by the 2nd Welsh Fusiliers, both of the

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Thirty-third Division. In both of these cases very extensive damage was done and numerous prisoners were taken. When one reads the intimate accounts of these affairs, the stealthy approaches, the blackened faces, the clubs and revolvers which formed the weapons, the ox-goads for urging Germans out of dug-outs, the dark lanterns and the knuckle-dusters —one feels that the age of adventure is not yet past and that the spirit of romance was not entirely buried in the trenches of modern war. There were 70 such raids in the week which preceded the great attack.

Before plunging into the huge task of following and describing the various phases of the mighty Battle of the Somme a word must be said upon the naval history of the period which can all be summed up in the Battle of Jutland, since the situation after that battle was exactly as it had always been before it. This fact in itself shows upon which side the victory lay, since the whole object of the movements of the German Fleet was to produce a relaxation in these conditions. Through the modesty of the British bulletins, which was pushed somewhat to excess, the position for some days was that the British, who had won everything, claimed nothing, while the Germans, who had won nothing, claimed everything. It is true that a number of our ships were sunk and of our sailors drowned, including Hood and Arbuthnot, two of the ablest of our younger admirals. Even by the German accounts, however, their own losses in proportion to their total strength were equally heavy, and we have every reason to doubt their accounts since they not only do not correspond with reliable observations upon our side, but because their

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second official account was compelled to admit that their first one had been false. The whole affair may be summed up by saying that after making an excellent fight they were saved from total destruction by the haze of evening, and fled back in broken array to their ports, leaving the North Sea now as always in British keeping. At the same time it cannot be denied that here as at Coronel and the Falklands the German ships were well fought, the gunnery was good, and the handling of the fleet, both during the battle and especially under the difficult circumstances of the flight in the darkness to avoid a superior fleet between themselves and home, was of a high order. It was a good clean fight, and in the general disgust at the flatulent claims of the Kaiser and his press the actual merit of the German performance did not perhaps receive all the appreciation which it deserved.

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CHAPTER II

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

Attack of the Seventh and Eighth Corps on Gommecourt, Serre, and Beaumont Hamel

Line of battle in the Somme sector—Great preparations—Advance of Forty-sixth North Midland Division—Advance of Fifty-sixth Territorials (London)—Great valour and heavy losses—Advance of Thirty-first Division—Advance of Fourth Division—Advance of Twenty-ninth Division—Complete failure of the assault.

THE continued German pressure at Verdun which had reached a high point in June called insistently for an immediate allied attack at the western end of the line. With a fine spirit of comradeship General Haig had placed himself and his armies at the absolute disposal of General Joffre, and was prepared to march them to Verdun, or anywhere else where he could best render assistance. The solid Joffre, strong and deliberate, was not disposed to allow the western offensive to be either weakened or launched prematurely on account of German attacks at the eastern frontier. He believed that Verdun could for the time look after herself, and the result showed the clearness of his vision. Meanwhile, he amassed a considerable French army, containing many of his best active troops, on either side of the Somme. General Foch was in command. They formed the right wing of the great allied force about to make a big

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CHAPTER II.

The Battle of the Somme.

effort to break or shift the iron German line, which had been built up with two years of labour, until it represented a tangled vista of trenches, parapets, and redoubts mutually supporting and bristling with machine-guns and cannon, for many miles of depth. Never in the whole course of history have soldiers been confronted with such an obstacle. Yet from general to private, both in the French and in the British armies, there was universal joy that the long stagnant trench life should be at an end, and that the days of action, even if they should prove to be days of death, should at last have come. Our concern is with the British forces, and so they are here set forth as they stretched upon the left or north of their good allies.

The southern end of the whole British line was held by the Fourth Army, commanded by General Rawlinson, an officer who has always been called upon when desperate work was afoot. His army consisted of five corps, each of which included from three to four divisions, so that his infantry numbered about 200,000 men, many of whom were veterans, so far as a man may live to be a veteran amid the slaughter of such a campaign. The Corps, counting from the junction with the French, were, the Thirteenth (Congreve), Fifteenth (Horne), Third (Pulteney), Tenth (Morland), and Eighth (Hunter-Weston). Their divisions, frontage, and the objectives will be discussed in the description of the battle itself.

North of Rawlinson's Fourth Army, and touching it at the village of Hébuterne, was Allenby's Third Army, of which one single corps, the Seventh (Snow), was engaged in the battle. This added

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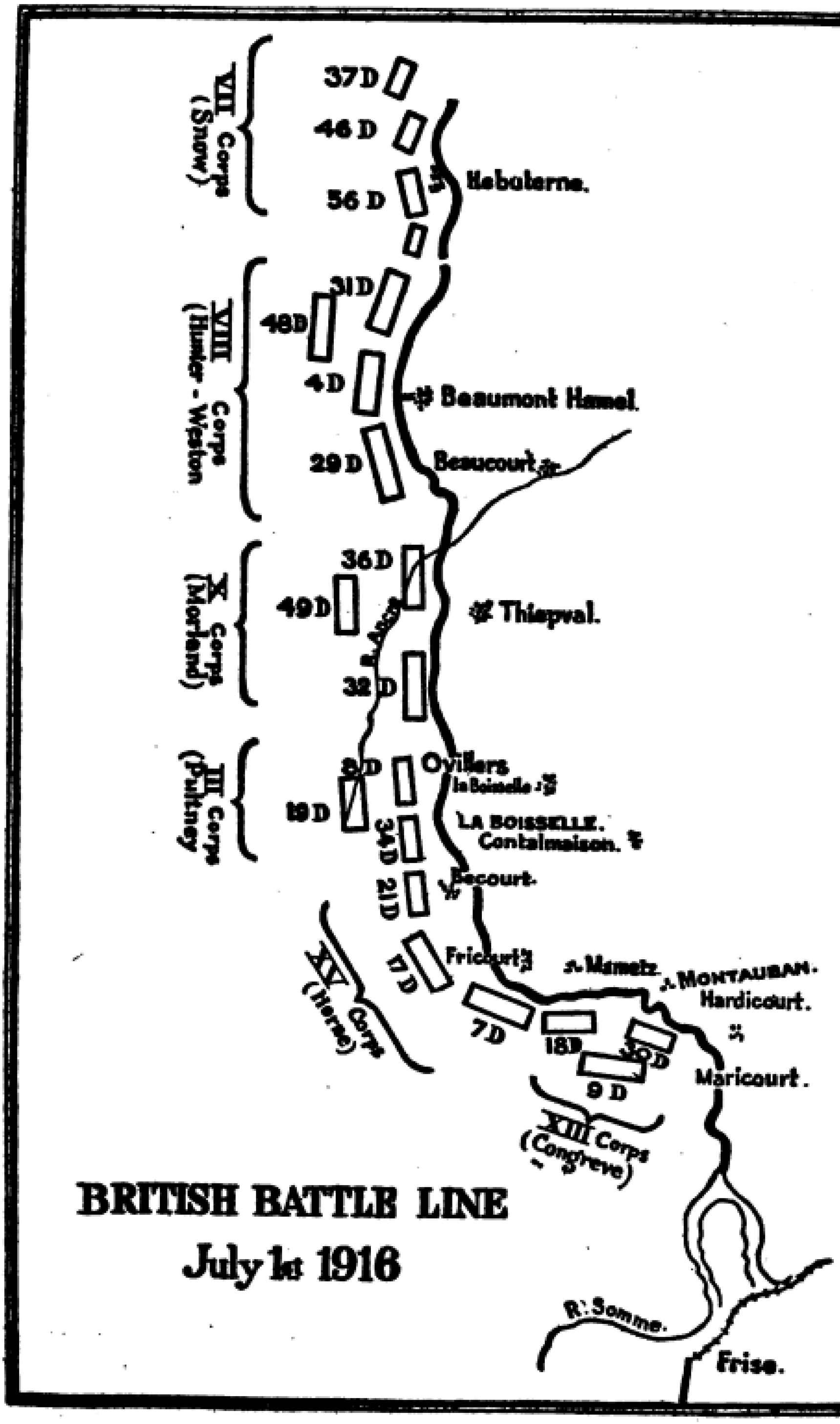

BRITISH BATTLE LINE
July 1st 1916

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three divisions, or about 30,000 infantry, to the numbers quoted above.

It had taken months to get the troops into position, to accumulate the guns, and to make the enormous preparations which such a battle must entail. How gigantic and how minute these are can only be appreciated by those who are acquainted with the work of the staffs. As to the Chief Staff of all, if a civilian may express an opinion upon so technical a matter, no praise seems to be too high for General Kiggell and the others under the immediate direction of Sir Douglas Haig, who had successively shown himself to be a great Corps General, a great Army leader, and now a great General-in-Chief. The preparations were enormous and meticulous, yet everything ran like a well-oiled piston-rod. Every operation of the attack was practised on similar ground behind the lines. New railheads were made, huge sidings constructed, and great dumps accumulated. The corps and divisional staffs were also excellent, but above all it was upon those hard-worked and usually overlooked men, the sappers, that the strain fell. Assembly trenches had to be dug, double communication trenches had to be placed in parallel lines, one taking the up-traffic and one the down, water supplies, bomb shelters, staff dug-outs, poison-gas arrangements, tunnels and mines—there was no end to the work of the sappers. The gunners behind laboured night after night in hauling up and concealing their pieces, while day after day they deliberately and carefully registered upon their marks. The question of ammunition supply had assumed incredible proportions. For the needs of one single corps forty-six miles of motor-lorries were engaged in

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bringing up the shells. However, by the end of June all was in place and ready. The bombardment began about June 23, and was at once answered by a German one of lesser intensity. The fact that the attack was imminent was everywhere known, for it was absolutely impossible to make such preparations and concentrations in a secret fashion. "Come on, we are ready for you," was hoisted upon placards on several of the German trenches. The result was to show that they spoke no more than the truth.

There were limits, however, to the German appreciation of the plans of the Allies. They were apparently convinced that the attack would come somewhat farther to the north, and their plans, which covered more than half of the ground on which the attack actually did occur, had made that region impregnable, as we were to learn to our cost. Their heaviest guns and their best troops were there. They had made a far less elaborate preparation, however, at the front, which corresponded with the southern end of the British line, and also on that which faced the French. The reasons for this may be surmised. The British front at that point is very badly supplied with roads (or was before the matter was taken in hand), and the Germans may well have thought that no advance upon a great scale was possible. So far as the French were concerned they had probably over-estimated the pre-occupation of Verdun and had not given our Allies credit for the immense reserve vitality which they were to show. The French front to the south of the Somme was also faced by a great bend of the river which must impede any advance. Then again it is wooded, broken country down there, and gives good concealment for masking

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an operation. These were probably the reasons which induced the Germans to make a miscalculation which proved to be an exceedingly serious one, converting what might have been a German victory into a great, though costly, success for the Allies, a prelude to most vital results in the future.

It is, as already stated, difficult to effect a surprise upon the large scale in modern warfare. There are still, however, certain departments in which with energy and ingenuity effects may be produced as unforeseen as they are disconcerting. The Air Service of the Allies, about which a book which would be one long epic of heroism could be written, had been growing stronger, and had dominated the situation during the last few weeks, but it had not shown its full strength nor its intentions until the evening before the bombardment. Then it disclosed both in most dramatic fashion. Either side had lines of stationary airships from which shell-fire is observed. To the stranger approaching the lines they are the first intimation that he is in the danger area, and he sees them in a double row, extending in a gradually dwindling vista, to either horizon. Now by a single raid and in a single night, every observation airship of the Germans was brought in flames to the earth. It was a splendid coup, splendidly carried out. Where the setting sun had shone on a long German array the dawn showed an empty Eastern sky. From that day for many a month the Allies had command of the air with all that it means to modern artillery. It was a good omen for the coming fight, and a sign of the great efficiency to which the British Air Service under General Trenchard had attained. The various types for scouting, for artillery work, for raid-

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ing, and for fighting were all very highly developed and splendidly handled by as gallant and chivalrous a band of heroic youths as Britain has ever enrolled among her guardians. The New F.E. machine and the de Haviland Biplane fighting machine were at this time equal to anything the Germans had in the air.

The attack had been planned for June 28, but the weather was so tempestuous that it was put off until it should moderate, a change which was a great strain upon every one concerned. July 1 broke calm and warm with a gentle south-western breeze. The day had come. All morning from early dawn there was intense fire, intensely answered, with smoke barrages thrown during the last half-hour to such points as could with advantage be screened. At 7.30 the guns lifted, the whistles blew, and the eager infantry were over the parapets. The great Battle of the Somme, the fierce crisis of Armageddon, had come. In following the fate of the various British forces during this eventful and most bloody day we will begin at the northern end of the line, where the Seventh Corps (Snow) faced the salient of Gommecourt.

This corps consisted of the Thirty-seventh, Forty-sixth, and Fifty-sixth Divisions. The former was not engaged and lay to the north. The others were told off to attack the bulge on the German line, the Forty-sixth upon the north, and the Fifty-sixth upon the south, with the village of Gommecourt as their immediate objective. Both were well-tried and famous territorial units, the Forty-sixth North Midland being the division which carried the Hohenzollern Redoubt upon October 13, 1915, while the Fifty-sixth was made up of the old London territorial bat-

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talions, which had seen so much fighting in earlier days while scattered among the regular brigades. Taking our description of the battle always from the north end of the line we shall begin with the attack of the Forty-sixth Division.

The assault was carried out by two brigades, each upon a two-battalion front. Of these the 137th Brigade of Stafford men were upon the right, while the 139th Brigade of Sherwood Foresters were on the left, each accompanied by a unit of sappers. The 138th Brigade, less one battalion, which was attached to the 137th, was in reserve. The attack was covered so far as possible with smoke, which was turned on five minutes before the hour. The general instructions to both brigades were that after crossing No Man's Land and taking the first German line they should bomb their way up the communication trenches, and so force a passage into Gommecourt Wood. Each brigade was to advance in four waves at fifty yards interval, with six feet between each man. Warned by our past experience of the wastage of precious material, not more than 20 officers of each battalion were sent forward with the attack, and a proportional number of N.C.O.'s were also withheld. The average equipment of the stormers, here and elsewhere, consisted of steel helmet, haversack, water-bottle, rations for two days, two gas helmets, tear-goggles, 220 cartridges, two bombs, two sandbags, entrenching tool, wire-cutters, field dressings, and signal-flare. With this weight upon them, and with trenches which were half full of water, and the ground between a morass of sticky mud, some idea can be formed of the strain upon the infantry.

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Both the attacking brigades got away with splendid steadiness upon the tick of time. In the case of the 137th Brigade the 6th South Staffords and 6th North Staffords were in the van, the former being on the right flank where it joined up with the left of the Fifty-sixth Division. The South Staffords came into a fatal blast of machine-gun fire as they dashed forward, and their track was marked by a thick litter of dead and wounded. None the less, they poured into the trenches opposite to them but found them strongly held by infantry of the Fifty-second German Division. There was some fierce bludgeon work in the trenches, but the losses in crossing had been too heavy and the survivors were unable to make good. The trench was held by the Germans and the assault repulsed. The North Staffords had also won their way into the front trenches, but in their case also they had lost so heavily that they were unable to clear the trench, which was well and stoutly defended. At the instant of attack, here as elsewhere, the Germans had put so terrific a barrage between the lines that it was impossible for the supports to get up and no fresh momentum could be added to the failing attack.

The fate of the right attack had been bad, but that of the left was even worse, for at this point we had experience of a German procedure which was tried at several places along the line with most deadly effect, and accounted for some of our very high losses. This device was to stuff their front line dug-outs with machine-guns and men, who would emerge when the wave of stormers had passed, attacking them from the rear, confident that their own rear was safe on account of the terrific barrage be-

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tween the lines. In this case the stormers were completely trapped. The 5th and 7th Sherwood Foresters dashed through the open ground, carried the trenches and pushed forward on their fiery career. Instantly the barrage fell, the concealed infantry rose behind them, and their fate was sealed. With grand valour the leading four waves stormed their way up the communication trenches and beat down all opposition until their own dwindling numbers and the failure of their bombs left them helpless among their enemies. Thus perished the first companies of two fine battalions, and few survivors of them ever won their way back to the British lines. Brave attempts were made during the day to get across to their aid, but all were beaten down by the terrible barrage. In the evening the 5th Lincolns made a most gallant final effort to reach their lost comrades, and got across to the German front line which they found to be strongly held. So ended a tragic episode. The cause which produced it was, as will be seen, common to the whole northern end of the line, and depended upon factors which neither officers nor men could control, the chief of which were that the work of our artillery, both in getting at the trench garrisons and in its counter-battery effects had been far less deadly than we had expected. The losses of the division came to about 2700 men.

The attack upon the southern side of the Gommecourt peninsula, though urged with the utmost devotion and corresponding losses, had no more success than that in the north. There is no doubt that the unfortunate repulse of the 137th Brigade upon their left, occurring as it did while the Fifty-sixth Division was still advancing, enabled the Germans to

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concentrate their guns and reserves upon the Londoners, but knowing what we know, it can hardly be imagined that under any circumstances, with failure upon either side of them, the division could have held the captured ground. The preparations for the attack had been made with great energy, and for two successive nights as many as 3000 men were out digging between the lines, which was done with such disciplined silence that there were not more than 50 casualties all told. The 167th Brigade was left in reserve, having already suffered heavily while holding the water-logged trenches during the constant shell-fall of the last week. The 7th Middlesex alone had lost 12 officers and 300 men from this cause—a proportion which may give some idea of what the heavy British bombardment may have meant to the Germans. The advance was, therefore, upon a two-brigade front, the 168th being on the right and the 169th upon the left. The London Scottish and the 12th London Rangers were the leading battalions of the 168th, while the Westminsters and Victorias led the 169th with the 4th London, 13th Kensingtons, 2nd London and London Rifle Brigade in support. The advance was made with all the fiery dash with which the Cockney soldiers have been associated. The first, second, and third German lines of trench were successively carried, and it was not until they, or those of them who were left, had reached the fourth line that they were held. It was powerfully manned, bravely defended, and well-provided with bombs—a terrible obstacle for a scattered line of weary and often wounded men. The struggle was a heroic one. Even now had their rear been clear, or had there been a shadow of support these determined

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men would have burst the only barrier which held them from Gommecourt. But the steel curtain of the barrage had closed down behind them, and every overrun trench was sending out its lurking occupants to fire into their defenceless backs. Bombs, too, are essential in such a combat, and bombs must ever be renewed, since few can be carried at a time. For long hours the struggle went on, but it was the pitiful attempt of heroic men to postpone that retreat which was inevitable. Few of the advanced line ever got back. The 3rd London, particularly, sent forward several hundred men with bombs, but hardly any got across. Sixty London Scots started on the same terrible errand. In the late afternoon the remains of the two brigades were back in the British front line, having done all, and more than all, that brave soldiers could be expected to do. The losses were very heavy. Never has the manhood of London in one single day sustained so grievous a loss. It is such hours which test the very soul of the soldier. War is not all careless slang and jokes and cigarettes, though such superficial sides of it may amuse the public and catch the eye of the descriptive writer. It is the most desperately earnest thing to which man ever sets his hand or his mind. Many a hot oath and many a frenzied prayer go up from the battle line. Strong men are shaken to the soul with the hysteria of weaklings, and balanced brains are dulled into vacancy or worse by the dreadful sustained shock of it. The more honour then to those who, broken and wearied, still hold fast in the face of all that human flesh abhors, bracing their spirits by a sense of soldierly duty and personal hon-

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our which is strong enough to prevail over death itself.

It is pleasing to be able to record an instance of good feeling upon the part of the enemy. Some remains of the old German spirit would now and again, though with sad rarity, shake itself free from the acrid and poisonous Prussian taint. On this occasion a German prisoner was sent back from our lines after nightfall with a note to the officer in command asking for details as to the fate of the British missing. An answer was found tied on to the barbed wire in the morning which gave the desired information. It is fair to state also that the wounded taken by the enemy appear to have met with good treatment.

So much for the gallant and tragic attack of the Seventh Corps. General Snow, addressing his men after the battle, pointed out that their losses and their efforts had not been all in vain. "I can assure you," he said, "that by your determined attack you managed to keep large forces of the enemy at your front, thereby materially assisting in the operations which were proceeding farther south with such marked success." No doubt the claim is a just one, and even while we mourn over the fate of four grand Army corps upon the left wing of the Allied Army, we may feel that they sacrificed themselves in order to assure the advance of those corps of their comrades to the south who had profited by the accumulation of guns and men to the north of them in order to burst their way through the German line. It is possible that here as on some other occasions the bitter hatred which the Germans had for the British, nurtured as it was by every lie which could appeal to their passions, had distorted their vision and twisted

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their counsels to an extent which proved to be their ruin.

The Eighth Corps, a magnificent body of troops, was under the command of General Sir Aylmer Hunter-Weston. It consisted of the Forty-eighth South Midland Territorial Division, the Fourth Regular Division, the Twenty-ninth Regular Division, and the Thirty-first Division of the New Army. Their front extended from Hébuterne in the north, where they joined on to the Fifty-sixth Division, down to a point just north of the Ancre, and it faced the very strong German positions of Serre in the north, and of Beaumont Hamel in the centre. The latter was an exceptionally difficult place, for it contained enormous quarries and excavations in which masses of Germans could remain concealed, almost immune to shell-fire and ready to sally out when needed. In spite of the terrific bombardment the actual damage done to the enemy was not excessive, and neither his numbers, his *moral*, nor his guns had been seriously diminished.

The order of battle was as follows: the Forty-eighth Division was in reserve, save for the 143rd Warwick Brigade. Of this brigade two battalions, the 5th and 6th Warwicks, were placed on a defensive line with orders to hold the trenches for about a mile south of Hébuterne. The 7th and 8th Warwicks were attached to the Fourth Division for the assault.

Immediately south of the defensive line held by the two Warwick battalions was the Thirty-first Division, having Serre for its objective. South of this, and opposite to Beaumont Hamel, was the Fourth, and south of this again was the Twenty-ninth Division, which had returned from the magnificent fail-

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ure of the Dardanelles, bearing with it a high reputation for efficiency and valour. Incorporated with it was a regiment of Newfoundlanders, men recruited from among the fishers and farmers of that northern land, the oldest colony of Britain. Such was the force, comprising nearly 50,000 excellent infantry, who set forth upon the formidable adventure of forcing the lines of Beaumont Hamel. They were destined to show the absolute impossibility of such a task in the face of a steadfast unshaken enemy, supported by a tremendous artillery, but their story is a most glorious one and many a great British victory contains no such record of tenacity and military virtue.

At quarter past five the assaulting lines were in the assembly trenches, and shortly afterwards the smoke and artillery barrages were released. At 7.20 an enormous mine, which had been run under Hawthorn Redoubt in front of the Fourth Division, was exploded, and a monstrous column of *débris*, with the accompanying shock of an earthquake, warned friend and foe that the hour of doom, the crisis of such mighty preparations, was at hand. At 7.30 the whistles blew, and the men, springing with eager alacrity over the parapet, advanced in successive lines of assault against the German trenches.

Before giving in detail the circumstances which determined the result in each division, it may be well to avoid wearisome iteration by giving certain facts which are common to each. In every case the troops advanced in an extended formation of companies in successive waves. In nearly every case the German front line was seized and penetrated, in no case was there any hesitation or disorder among the advanc-

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ing troops, but the highest possible degree of discipline and courage was shown by regulars, territorials, and men of the New Army, nor could it be said that there was any difference between them. In each case also the Germans met the assault with determined valour; in each case the successive lines of trenches were more strongly held, and the assailants were attacked from the rear by those who emerged from the dug-outs behind them, and above all in each case a most murderous artillery fire was opened from a semicircle all round the German position, but especially from one huge accumulation of heavy guns, said to number a hundred batteries, stationed on the high ground near Bucquoy and commanding the British position. These guns formed successive lines of barrage with shrapnel and high explosives, one of them about 200 yards behind the British line, to cut off the supports; another 50 yards behind; another 50 yards in front; and a fourth of shrapnel which was under observed control, and followed the troops in their movements. The advanced lines of assault were able in most cases to get through before these barrages were effectively established, but they made it difficult, deadly, and often impossible, for the lines which followed.

None the less it is the opinion of skilled observers that the shell-fire alone, however heavy, could not have taken the edge from the inexorable insistence of the British attack. It is to the skill and to the personal gallantry of the German machine-gunners that the result is to be traced. The bombardment of the German line had been so severe that it was hoped that most of the machine-guns had been rooted out. So indeed they had, but they had been with-

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drawn to the safety of excavations in the immediate rear. Suspecting this, the British artillery sprayed the ground behind the trenches with showers of shrapnel to prevent their being brought forward again. This barrage was not sufficient to subdue the gunners, who dashed forward and established their pieces at the moment of the assault upon the various parapets and points of vantage, from which, regardless of their own losses, they poured a withering fire upon the infantry in the open. These brave Wurtembergers were seen, with riflemen at their side, exposed waist-deep and dropping fast, but mowing the open slope as with a scythe of steel. "I cannot," said a general officer, who surveyed the whole scene, "adequately express my admiration for the British who advanced, or for the Germans who stood up under such a heavy barrage to oppose them." It was indeed that contest between the chosen children of Odin in which Professor Cramb has declared that the high gods of virility might well rejoice.

We will now turn to the left of the line and carry on the detailed description of the general assault from that of the 56th Territorials in the north, who were linked up by the defensive line of the Warwicks. The Thirty-first Division was on the left of the Eighth Corps. Of this division, two brigades, the 93rd and the 94th, were in the line, with the 92nd in reserve. The 93rd, which consisted of the 15th, 16th, 18th West Yorks, and the 18th Durhams, was on the right, the 94th, including the 11th East Lancashires, and the 12th, 13th, and 14th York and Lancasters, were on the left. The advance was made upon a front of two companies, each company on a

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front of two platoons, the men extended to three paces interval. On the left the leading battalions were the 11th East Lancashires and 12th York and Lancasters, the latter on the extreme left flank of the whole division. That this position with its exposed flank was the place of honour and of danger, may be best indicated by the fact that the Colonel and six orderlies were the only men who could be collected of this heroic Sheffield battalion upon the next morning. On the right, the leading troops were the 15th and 16th West Yorks. These grand North-countrymen swept across No Man's Land, dressed as if on parade, followed in succession by the remaining battalions, two of which, the 13th and 14th York and Lancasters, were the special town units of Barnsley and Leeds. "I have never seen and could not have imagined such a magnificent display of gallantry, discipline, and determination," said the observer who has been already quoted. The men fell in lines, but the survivors with backs bent, heads bowed, and rifles at the port, neither quickened nor slackened their advance, but went forward as though it was rain and not lead which lashed them. Here and elsewhere the German machine-gunners not only lined the parapet, but actually rushed forward into the open, partly to get a flank fire, and partly to come in front of the British barrage. Before the blasts of bullets the lines melted away, and the ever-decreasing waves only reached the parapet here and there, lapping over the spot where the German front lines had been, and sinking for ever upon the further side. About a hundred gallant men of the East Lancashires, favoured perhaps by some curve in the ground, got past more than one line of trenches, and

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a few desperate individuals even burst their way as far as Serre, giving a false impression that the village was in our hands. But the losses had been so heavy that the weight and momentum had gone out of the attack, while the density of the resistance thickened with every yard of advance. By the middle of the afternoon the survivors of the two attacking brigades were back in their own front line trenches, having lost the greater part of their effectives. The 15th West Yorks had lost heavily in officers, and the 16th and 18th were little better off. The 18th Durhams suffered less, being partly in reserve. Of the 94th Brigade the two splendid leading battalions, the 11th East Lancashires and 12th York and Lancaster, had very many killed within the enemy line. The heaviest loss in any single unit was in the 11th East Lancashires. The strength of the position is indicated by the fact that when attacked by two divisions in November, with a very powerful backing of artillery, it was still able to hold its own.

The experiences of all the troops engaged upon the left of the British attack were so similar and their gallantry was so uniform, that any variety in description depends rather upon the units engaged than upon what befell them. Thus in passing from the Thirty-first Division to the Fourth upon their right, the general sequence of cause and effect is still the same. In this instance the infantry who rushed, or rather strode, to the assault were, counting from the right, the 1st East Lancs, the 1st Rifle Brigade, and the 8th Warwicks, who were immediately followed by the 1st Hants, the 1st Somersets, and the 6th Warwicks, advancing with three companies in front and one in support. The objective here as else-

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where upon the left was the capture of the Serre-Grandcourt Ridge, with the further design of furnishing a defensive flank for the operations lower down. The troops enumerated belonged to the 11th Brigade, led by the gallant Prowse, who fell hit by a shell early in the assault, calling after his troops that they should remember that they were the Stonewall Brigade. The attack was pressed with incredible resolution, and met with severe losses. Again the front line was carried and again the thin fringe of survivors had no weight to drive the assault forward, whilst they had no cover to shelter them in the ruined lines which they had taken. The Somerset men had the honour of reaching the farthest point attained by the division. "If anything wants shifting the Somersets will do it." So said their General before the action. But both their flanks were in the air, and their position was an impossible one, while the right of the attack north of Beaumont Hamel had been entirely held up. Two units of the 10th Brigade advanced about 9 o'clock on the right, and two of the 12th on the left. These were in their order, the 2nd Dublins, 2nd Seaforths, 2nd Essex, and 1st King's Own Lancasters. All went forward with a will, but some could not get beyond their own front trenches, and few got over the German line. All the weight of their blood so lavishly and cheerfully given could not tilt the scale towards victory. Slowly the survivors of the Somersets and Rifle Brigade were beaten back with clouds of bombers at their heels. The 8th Warwicks, who, with some of the 6th Warwicks, had got as far forward as any of the supporting line, could not turn the tide. Late in the afternoon the assault had definitely failed, and the

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remainder were back in their own front trenches, which had now to be organised against the very possible counter-attack. Only two battalions of the division remained intact, and the losses included General Prowse, Colonel the Hon. C. W. Palk of the Hampshires, Colonel Thicknesse of the Somersets, Colonel Wood of the Rifle Brigade, and Colonel Franklin of the 6th Warwicks, all killed; while Colonels Innes of the 8th Warwicks, Hopkinson of the Seaforths, and Green of the East Lancashires were wounded. For a long time a portion of the enemy's trench was held by mixed units, but it was of no value when detached from the rest and was abandoned in the evening. From the afternoon onwards no possible course save defence was open to General Lambton. There was considerable anxiety about one company of Irish Fusiliers who were in a detached portion of the German trench, but they succeeded in getting back next morning, bringing with them not only their wounded but some prisoners.

Immediately to the right of the Fourth Division was the Twenty-ninth Division[1] from Gallipoli, which rivalled in its constancy and exceeded in its losses its comrades upon the left. The 86th Brigade and the 87th formed the first line, with the 88th in support.

The van of the attack upon the right of the division was formed by the 1st Inniskilling Fusiliers and

[1] Since the constituents of this famous regular Division have not been given in full (as has been done with their comrades in preceding volumes) they are here enumerated as they were on July 1, 1916:

86th Brigade.—2nd Royal Fusiliers, 1st Lancashire Fusiliers, 1st Dublin Fusiliers, 16th Middlesex.

87th Brigade.—1st Inniskilling Fusiliers, 1st South Wales Borderers, 1st Scottish Borderers, 1st Border Regiment.

88th Brigade.—1st Essex, 2nd Hants, 4th Worcesters, Newfoundland Regiment.

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the Welsh Borderers, while the van upon the left was formed by the 2nd Royal Fusiliers and the 1st Lancashire Fusiliers. The other battalions of the brigades formed the supporting line, and two battalions of the 88th Brigade, the Essex and the Newfoundlanders, were also drawn into the fight, so that, as in the Fourth Division, only two battalions remained intact at the close, the nucleus upon which in each case a new division had to be formed.

Upon the explosion of the great mine already mentioned two platoons of the 2nd Royal Fusiliers with machine-guns and Stokes mortars rushed forward to seize the crater. They got the near lip, but the enemy were already in possession of the far side, and no further advance could be made. At this point, and indeed at nearly all points down the line, the wire was found to have been very thoroughly cut by the artillery fire, but for some reason our own wire had not been cut to the same extent and was a serious obstacle to our own advance.

Parties of the leading regiments were speedily up to the German front-line trench, but their advance beyond it was delayed by the fact that the dug-outs were found to be full of lurking soldiers who had intended no doubt to rush out and attack the stormers in the rear, as in the case of the Forty-sixth and Fifty-sixth Divisions in the north, but who were discovered in time and had to fight for their lives. These men were cleared out upon the right, and the advance then made some progress, but on the left by 9 o'clock the 86th Brigade had been completely held up by a murderous machine-gun fire in front of Beaumont Hamel, a position which, as already explained, presented peculiar difficulties. The Essex and New-

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foundland men of the 88th Brigade were ordered forward and charged with such splendid resolution that the advance was carried forward again, and the whole situation changed for the better. By 10.15 the casualties had become so great, however, through the fire of flanking machine-guns, that it was clear that the attack could not possibly reach its objective. The huge crater left by the explosion of the Beaumont Hamel mine was held for hours as a redoubt, but it also was enfiladed by fire and became untenable. By half-past ten the action had resolved itself into a bombardment of the German front line once more, and the assault had definitely failed. There was an attempt to renew it, but when it was found that the 86th Brigade and the 87th Brigade were equally reduced in numbers, it was recognised that only a defensive line could be held. It is true that the Divisional General had the Worcesters and the Hants still in hand, and was prepared to attack with them, but a further loss might have imperilled the Divisional line, so no advance was allowed.

All the troops of the Twenty-ninth Division had lived up to their fame, but a special word should be said of the Newfoundlanders who, in their first action, kept pace with the veterans beside them. This battalion of fishermen, lumbermen, and farmers proved once more the grand stuff which is bred over the sea—the stuff which Bernhardi dismissed in a contemptuous paragraph. "They attacked regardless of loss, moving forward in extended order, wave behind wave. It was a magnificent exhibition of disciplined courage." Well might General Hunter-Weston say next day after visiting the survivors: "To hear men cheering as they did, after undergo-

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ing such an experience, and in the midst of such mud and rain, made one proud to have the command of such a battalion.'' The losses of the Newfoundlanders were severe. Losses are always the index of the sorrow elsewhere, but when they fall so heavily upon a small community, where every man plays a vital part and knows his neighbour, they are particularly distressing. From Cape Race to the coast of Labrador there was pride and mourning over that day. The total losses of the division were heavy, and included Colonels Pierce and Ellis of the Inniskillings and Borderers.

It must have been with a heavy heart that General Hunter-Weston realised, with the approach of night, that each of his divisions had met with such losses that the renewal of the attack was impossible. He, his Divisional Commanders, his officers and his men had done both in their dispositions and in their subsequent actions everything which wise leaders and brave soldiers could possibly accomplish. If a criticism could be advanced it would be that the attack was urged with such determined valour that it would not take No until long after No was the inevitable answer. But grim persistence has won many a fight, and no leader who is worthy to lead can ever have an excess of it. They were up against the impossible, as were their companions to right and left. It is easy to recognise it now, but it could not be proved until it had been tested to the uttermost. Could other tactics, other equipment, other methods of guarding the soldiers, have brought them across the fatal open levels? It may be so and can again only be tried by testing. But this at least was proved for all time, that given clear ground, unshaken troops,

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prepared positions, and ample artillery, no human fire and no human hardihood can ever hope to break such a defensive line. It should be added that here as elsewhere the British artillery, though less numerous than it became at a later date, was admirable both in its heavy and in its lighter pieces. Observers have recorded that under its hammer blows the German trenches kept momentarily changing their shape, while the barrage was as thick and accurate and the lifting as well-timed as could have been wished. There was no slackness anywhere, either in preparation or in performance, and nothing but the absolute impossibility of the task under existing conditions stood in the way of success.

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CHAPTER III

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

Attack of the Tenth and Third Corps, July 1, 1916

Magnificent conduct of the Ulster Division—Local success but general failure—Advance of Thirty-second Division—Advance of Eighth Division—Advance of Thirty-fourth Division—The turning-point of the line.

MORLAND's Tenth Corps consisted of the Thirty-sixth, Forty-ninth, and Thirty-second Divisions. It lay between Hunter-Weston's Eighth Corps upon the left, and Pulteney's Third Corps upon the right. It covered a front from a mile north of Hamel to a mile north of Ovillers. At its northern end it was cut by the river Ancre, a sluggish canalised stream, running between two artificial dykes which the Germans periodically cut by their artillery fire and the British mended as best they might. This sector of attack, together with the one farther south which faced the Third Corps, presented peculiar difficulties to the assailants, as the ground sloped upward to the strong village of Thiepval with the ridge behind it, from which German guns could sweep the whole long glacis of approach. Nowhere were there more gallant efforts for a decision and nowhere was it more hopeless.

The division to the north of the Tenth Corps was the Thirty-sixth Ulster Division. This division was

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composed of magnificent material, for the blend of Scot and Celt to be found in the north of Ireland produces a soldier who combines the fire of the one with the solidity of the other. These qualities have been brought to a finer temper by the atmosphere of opposition in which they have lived, and the difficult economical circumstances which they have overcome in so remarkable a way. Long ago in unhappy civil strife they had shown their martial qualities and now upon a nobler and wider stage they were destined to confirm them. It might well seem invidious to give the palm to any one of the bands of heroes who shed their blood like water on the slopes of Picardy, but at least, all soldiers would agree that among them all there was not one which could at its highest claim more than equality of achievement that day with the men of Ulster.

The objective of this division was the German position from Beaucourt-sur-Ancre on the north, to the northern edge of Thiepval. When the signal was given the two leading brigades, the 108th and the 107th, came away at a deliberate pace which quickened into the rush of a released torrent, and went roaring over the German trenches. "They were like bloodhounds off the leash." Like every one else they were horribly scourged by shrapnel and machine-fire as they rushed across, but whether it was that some curve in the ground favoured part of their line, or whatever the cause, they suffered less than the other divisions, and struck on to the German front line with their full shattering momentum, going through it as though it were paper. The 108th Brigade, consisting of the 9th Irish Fusiliers and the 11th, 12th, and 13th Irish Rifles, was on the left,

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Two of these, the Fusiliers and one of the Irish Rifle battalions, were on the north side of the Ancre, and were acting rather with the Twenty-ninth Division upon their left than with their own comrades on the right. This detachment fought all day side by side with the regulars, made their way at one time right up to Beaucourt Station, and had finally to retire to their own trenches together with the rest of the line north of the Ancre. Next morning the survivors crossed the Ancre, and from then onwards the Eighth Corps extended so as to take over this ground.

South of the Ancre the two remaining battalions of the 108th Brigade, and the whole of the 107th Brigade, consisting of the 8th, 9th, 10th, and 15th Irish Rifles, advanced upon a front of 3000 yards. The men had lost very heavily in the assembly trenches, and two companies of the 10th Irish Rifles had dwindled to two platoons before ever they got clear of the shattered wood in which they gathered. None the less, the fire and fury of their onset were terrific and sustained. "The place was covered with smoke and the explosion of heavy shells," says one who saw the scene from a front observation post. "I felt that no attack was possible, when suddenly out of the clouds I saw men advancing as if on parade, quite slowly. It seemed impossible, and yet they went on, stormed at on the left by high explosive and shrapnel, and on the right by enfilade machine-gun fire. Suddenly they charged, and when I could next see through the clouds on the slope (less than a mile away) I saw that they had taken the front trench, and in another minute the trench behind was taken, as our fellows shouting, 'No sur-

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render!' got through—God knows how! As they advanced the fire of the guns became more and more enfilade, but nothing could stop their steady progress.''

The long line of Irish Riflemen had rolled over every obstacle, and although their dead and wounded lay thick behind them they still stormed forwards with the same fury with which they started. Bunching up into platoons in artillery formation they pushed on and carried the third line. Ahead of them, across a considerable interval, was a fourth line, with a large redoubt upon the flank. They steadied themselves for a few minutes, and then dashing onwards once again they captured both the fourth line and the redoubt. So far forward were they now that they had reached regions north of Thiepval which were never trodden by a British foot again until three months of constant fighting had cleared a way to them. It was the great Schwaben Redoubt which was now before them. The reserve brigade, the 109th, consisting of the 9th, 10th, and 11th Inniskilling Fusiliers, with the 14th Irish Rifles, had dashed forward at 10.40, leaving only the pioneer battalion, the 16th Irish Rifles, to guard the trenches. With the additional weight of the survivors of this reinforcing line the fringe of stormers, for they were now a fringe and nothing more, again rushed forward and threw themselves into the Schwaben trenches. This was their limit, and for most of them their grave. They had no further supports, no ammunition could reach them, and they were embedded in the depths of the German line at a point far deeper than any unit upon the left of the line had attained. The village of Thiepval com-

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manded them from their right rear. Some remained in little groups, huddling in some coign of vantage, and fighting to the last cartridge, absolutely refusing to take one step to the rear. To the Germans they were as dangerous as so many cornered wolves. Others fell back in orderly fashion, but not an inch farther than was needful, for they held on all day to the frontage taken by them. The first two lines were kept in their fierce grip till nightfall of the next day, when they handed them over to the relieving division.

In this splendid deed of arms the Thirty-sixth Division left half its number upon the battle-field. The instances of gallantry were innumerable, and so equally distributed that their General, when asked to name a special battalion, could only answer that the whole twelve had done equally well. Had the divisions to right and left been able to get as far, the whole gain would have been permanent. As it was, 540 prisoners were brought in, and few were lost save the wounded, chief of whom was Colonel Craig, who directed the movements of his men long after he was unable to direct his own. Colonel Bernard of the 10th Rifles, Captain Davidson, who worked his machine-gun after his leg was shattered, Captain Gaffikin, who died while leading his company with an orange handkerchief waving in his hand, are but a few of the outstanding names. The pressure upon the different brigades is indicated by the losses in officers of the 107th, the 108th, and the 109th.

A very detailed account would be necessary to bring home to the reader the full gallantry of this deed of arms. Experienced soldiers who saw it were moved to the limit of human speech. "I wish I had

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been born an Ulsterman," cried one of them. "But I am proud to have been associated with these wonderful men." To have penetrated all alone for two miles into the German line, and to withdraw from such a salient in military order, holding fast to all that could be retained, was indeed a great feat for any troops to have performed. The requiem for their fallen was best expressed by one of the survivors, who wrote that "they died for the cause of Liberty, Honour, and Freedom, for the Old Flag, the emblem of Britain, died for Ireland, died for Ulster!"

The Thirty-second Division was on the immediate right of the men of Ulster. Their advance was carried out with the 96th Brigade on the left, the 97th upon the right, and the 14th in support. The reader may be warned that from this time onwards he will often find, as in this case, that old brigades have been added to new formations, so that the former simplicity of numbering is often disturbed. The storming lines went forward in each case with two battalions abreast in front and two in succession in support. The front line of attack taken from the north, or left, consisted of the 15th Lancashire Fusiliers, 16th Northumberland Fusiliers, and the 16th and 17th Highland Light Infantry. Of these four battalions the 16th Northumberland Fusiliers came under very heavy fire, and were unable to press their attack home. On the right the Highlanders had crawled up to within a hundred yards of the Leipzig salient and were into it with a rush the moment that the barrage lifted. The 15th Lancashire Fusiliers upon the left made a particularly brilliant advance. The right company was held up in front of Thiepval

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village, but the left company swept on with the Thirty-sixth Division, keeping pace with their magnificent advance. It appears to have reached the east end of Thiepval, but there it was buried deeply in the enemy's position and was never heard of again. The supporting battalions of the 96th Brigade, the 16th Lancashire Fusiliers, and the 2nd Inniskilling Fusiliers, tried hard to regain touch with their lost comrades, but in vain. These various gallant bodies who, at different points of our line, pushed forward into impossible positions, were no doubt for the greater part killed or wounded, but from among them came the 850 prisoners whom the Germans claimed to have taken on the northern part of the line on that day. The left of the divisional line was so weakened by these losses that they were compelled to withdraw to their own front trenches.

On the right, however, the Highlanders were able to hold on to a part of the Leipzig salient. The losses, however, upon this flank had been very heavy, not only in the front wave, but among the 1st Dorsets and the 11th Borders as they came out from a wood in support. Coming under a concentrated fire of machine-guns, these two battalions suffered heavily. Colonel Machell, gallantly leading his Borders, was shot dead, his adjutant, Lieutenant Gordon, was badly wounded as he stooped over his body, Major Diggle was wounded, and the greater part of the officers were on the ground. Colonel Machell, it may be remarked, was a high civil official of the Egyptian Government, Under-secretary for the Interior, whose patriotism had led him to join the New Armies and thus to meet his death upon the field of battle. The 1st Dorsets lost nearly as heavily as the

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men of the Border; their leader, Major Shute, was disabled, and their ranks thrown into temporary confusion. They were splendidly rallied, however, by the adjutant, who led them on and succeeded with the survivors in reaching the Leipzig Redoubt. Colonel Laidlaw, of the 16th Highland Light Infantry, had also been wounded, the third commanding officer killed or injured on this wing of the attack.

There had been no flinching anywhere, and the military virtue shown had been of the highest possible quality; but the losses from the machine-guns and from the barrage were so heavy that they deprived the attack of the weight and momentum necessary to win their way through the enemy's position. Under the desperate circumstances, it might well be considered a remarkable result that a stretch of the Leipzig Redoubt should be won and permanently held by the Highlanders, especially by the 17th Highland Light Infantry. The sappers had prepared a Russian sap running up to the enemy line, and this was invaluable as a communication trench. On the 2nd and 3rd the enemy endeavoured to turn out the intruders, but the 2nd Manchesters and 15th Highland Light Infantry not only held their ground, but enlarged it. On the night of the 3rd the division was relieved by the Twenty-fifth Division and withdrew to refit after its tragic but splendid exertions.

Out of the novel conditions of what may be called Bloch warfare certain rules and axioms are slowly evolving. That it is impossible without artificial protection to attack over the open against an unshaken enemy provided with machine-guns is the most certain. But there is another which might be formulated thus: If there are sharp salients in the

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enemy line, either these salients must be taken first, or the attack must be made out of range of them, otherwise their guns must flank the whole advance. Very many examples might be quoted where the disregard of this axiom has brought disaster to either side. A conspicuous case would be that of the Third Corps now to be described, where the sinister salient of Thiepval protruded to the north, and a smaller but very efficient one to the south, so that the whole advance was conducted under the fire of two lines of guns which raked it from end to end. In addition the opposing infantry included a division of the Prussian Guard. In the whole long position there would appear to be no sector where there was less prospect for success, and yet there was no sector where it was more essential to hold the enemy fast, since victory might await us to the immediate south.

The Third Corps, under General Pulteney, occupied the front immediately to the east of Albert. This large town was almost exactly in the centre of its rear, and the important road from Albert to Bapaume bisected the British position. Ovillers to the north, within the German lines, and Bécourt to the south, in the British, marked roughly the two ends of the sector. It was a comparatively narrow stretch, so that only two divisions were in the firing line, and one in reserve. These were respectively the Eighth Regular Division to the north, the Thirty-fourth of the New Army to the south, and the Nineteenth, also of the New Army, in support.

Had the Thirty-second Division succeeded in holding its grip upon Thiepval upon the north, there might have been some chance of success, but as it was, the machine-guns from that quarter shaved the

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whole of No Man's Land as a mower may shave a lawn, and after the first rush, which carried the brave fellows of the Eighth Division over the trenches, it proved to be absolutely impossible to send them either supports or supplies. The main body of this magnificent division disappeared into the smoke and haze of the battle, and their comrades in the trenches waited with aching hearts, their eyes fixed upon their front where the roar of battle rose from the other side of the pelting sleet of bullets. All day they waited, dashing out occasionally and being beaten back with ever-dwindling numbers. After dusk, they searched the shell-holes and brought in some 400 wounded. A few bewildered men came staggering in during the night, half-delirious with fatigue and strain, and unable themselves to say how they had got back across the enemy's front line from the depths to which they had penetrated.

This tragic but heroic attack in which the whole force who went forward fought literally to the death, was carried out in the following order:

On the right was the 23rd Brigade; in the centre the 25th; and on the left the 70th. The 23rd and 25th were the old hard-working units of Neuve Chapelle and many another fray. The 70th was a particularly fine brigade of the New Army. This division had up to the last moment been without a pioneer battalion, but the infantry had dug themselves particularly good assembly and communication trenches, which helped them much upon the day of battle. They had also, under the direction of the Commander of Divisional sappers, run two covered ways up to the enemy's trenches which might have been a vital factor

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in the day's work, had it not been that the stormers pushed on, leaving it to others to secure their gains. The result was that the advancing infantry passed rather than occupied the front trenches, the barrage cut off supports, the enemy emerged from their dug-outs, and the line still remained under their control, forbidding the use or even the disclosure of the covered ways, since men could not emerge in single file in an enemy trench.

Following the plan of describing operations always from the north, we will first picture from such reliable material as is available the attack of the 70th Brigade, which contained some of the finest North-country stuff that ever fought the battles of the country. This brigade was separated on the north by a clear space of about 300 yards from the Highland Light Infantry of the 97th Brigade, who formed the extreme right of the Thirty-second Division. The 8th York and Lancaster was the flank battalion, with the 8th Yorkshire Light Infantry upon its right. The 9th York and Lancaster were behind their comrades, and the 11th Sherwood Foresters behind the Light Infantry.

As it is impossible to give with any fulness the story of any one regiment, and as each may be taken as typical of the others, we may follow the front flank battalion on its advance. This, the 8th York and Lancaster, consisted almost entirely of miners, a class of men who have furnished grand military material to the New Armies. This unit came chiefly from the Rotherham district. The frontage of the battalion was 750 yards.

As the hour of attack approached, the enemy's counter-bombardment became so violent that there

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was the utmost difficulty in getting the men into the front-line trenches. Many were killed and even buried before the advance had begun. When the whistles blew the stormers went forward in four waves with 50 yards between, the supporting battalions following instantly. The machine-guns were sweeping the ground and about 350 yards had to be covered between the lines. Officers and men went down in heaps under the enfilade fire from four lines of guns, one behind the other, in the Thiepval district. The approach was over a billiard-table glacis with no cover of any kind. The ranks kept formation and trudged steadily forward, throwing themselves headlong into the front German trenches. There they steadied themselves for a few minutes, and then advancing once more sprang down into the second German line which was strongly held. Colonel Maddison had been shot down early in the attack. Captain Dawson, the adjutant, had been wounded, but staggered on with the men until he was killed at the second line of trenches. "Come on, boys! let's get at 'em and clear 'em out!" were his last words. On this second line the battalion, together with its support, beat itself to pieces. A few survivors unable to get back were taken prisoners, and a German report has stated that they were very proud and defiant when marched away. At night a number of wounded were carried in along the whole divisional front from No Man's Land, but many lives were lost in the gallant work, and many of the wounded also lost their lives in trying to crawl back, for the Germans turned their machine-guns during the daytime upon everything that moved in front of their lines.

To show how uniform was the experience, one may

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quote the doings of a battalion of the 23rd Brigade. This brigade was on the right of the Eighth Division line, and the 2nd Middlesex, the battalion in question, formed the right battalion joining on with the Tyneside Scottish of the Thirty-fourth Division to the south. Upon its left was the 2nd Devons. The supporting troops, two companies of the 2nd West Yorkshires and the 2nd Scottish Rifles, seem to have been held back when it was seen how fatal was the advance, and so in part escaped from the catastrophe. The Middlesex advanced almost opposite to La Boiselle. There was a slight dip in the ground to the immediate front which formed a partial protection from the machine-guns, so that although the losses were very heavy, about 300 men with six Lewis guns made good their footing in the German front-line trench. Their gallant commander was wounded twice, but still kept at their head while they swept onwards to the second line. It was stuffed with Germans, but the handful of British stormers flung themselves in among them and cleared a standing place in the trench. The German guns, however, had the exact range, and four out of the six Lewis guns were blown into the air. Finally, only five men and a sergeant were left unwounded in this trench. This handful made its way back. One hundred and thirty of the Middlesex men seem to have got through or round on to the Pozières Road, but their fate was never cleared up. Finally, only 30 men of this grand battalion answered the roll-call that night.

The space between the two attacks described from the point of view of the two wing battalions of the division was occupied by the 25th Brigade, whose advance and losses were exactly similar to those which

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have been narrated. The 2nd Lincolns and 2nd Berkshires were the leading battalions, and their devotion in attempting the impossible was as great as that of their comrades to right and left.

Both regiments suffered heavily, and it is probable that the Berkshires went deeper than any other. The 1st Irish Rifles had occupied the trenches for six days in dreadful weather and had suffered heavily from the retaliatory bombardment of the Germans. They were therefore held in reserve, but none the less made repeated efforts and with great loss to cross the barrage and help their comrades, for which they afterwards received a special message of thanks from the Divisional Commander.

Up to this point the writer has been faced by the painful and monotonous task of one long record of failure from Gommecourt in the north to La Boiselle in the south. It cannot be doubted that we had overestimated the effects of our bombardment, and that the German guns were intact to a degree which was unexpected. Our one consolation must be that the German reserves were held in their position, and that improved prospects were assured for the remainder of the British line and for the whole of the French line. Had the front of the battle covered only the region which has been treated up to now, the episode would have been a tragic one in British military history. Thousands of men had fallen, nor could it be truthfully said that anything of permanence had been achieved. Next day the remains of the Eighth Division were withdrawn, the 70th Brigade was restored to the Twenty-third Division, to which it rightfully belonged, and the Twelfth Division came forward to fill the gap in the line, helped

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by the gunners and sappers of the Eighth, who remained at their posts until July 4.

On the right of the Eighth Division was the Thirty-fourth, a unit which consisted of one mixed English and Scotch Brigade; while the other two were raised respectively from the Tyneside Irish and from the Tyneside Scots, hardy and martial material from the coalpits and foundries of the North. They attacked upon the front between the Albert-Bapaume Road on the north and the village of Bécourt on the south. The idea was to storm La Boiselle village, and to push the attack home both north and south of it upon Contalmaison, which lay behind it. Immediately before the assault two great mines were blown, one of which, containing the unprecedented amount of 60,000 lbs. of gun-cotton, threw hundreds of tons of chalk into the air. Within a few minutes of the explosion the Thirty-fourth Division were out of their trenches and advancing in perfect order upon the German trenches. The 101st Brigade, consisting of the 15th and 16th Royal Scots, the 10th Lincolns, and 11th Suffolks, were on the right, the Tyneside Scots upon the left, and the Tyneside Irish in support behind the right brigade. In the immediate rear lay the Nineteenth Division with instructions to hold and consolidate the ground gained.

In no part of the line was the advance more gallant, and it marks the point at which unalloyed failure began first to change to partial success, ripening into complete victory in the southern section. Some slight cover seems to have helped the troops for the first few hundred yards, and it would appear also that though the small-arm fire was very severe, the

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actual shell-fire was not so heavy as that which devastated the divisions in the north. None the less, the obstacles were sufficient to test to the highest any troops in the world, and they were gloriously surmounted by men, none of whom had been in action before. "I, their commander," wrote the Divisional General, "will never forget their advance through the German curtain of fire. It was simply wonderful, and they behaved like veterans." The scream of the war-pipes, playing "The Campbells are coming," warmed the blood of the soldiers. Upon the left, the Tyneside Scots penetrated two lines of trenches and found themselves to the north of the village of La Boiselle, where further progress was made impossible by a murderous fire from front and flank. Of the four battalions of the 101st Brigade, the two English units were nearly opposite the village, and though they advanced with great resolution, they were unable to get a permanent lodgment. The two Royal Scots battalions upon the flank got splendidly forward, and some of them made their way deeper into the German line than any organised body of troops, save only the Ulster men, had succeeded in doing, getting even as far as the outskirts of Contalmaison. The valiant leader of the advanced party of the 15th Royal Scots was wounded, but continued to encourage his men and to try to consolidate his desperate position, which was nearly a mile within the German lines. He was again severely wounded, and Lieutenant Hole was killed, upon which the only remaining officer fell back to a point some hundreds of yards westward, called Round Wood or Round Alley. Here the Scots stuck fast, and nothing could budge them. Germans were

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in front of them, were in La Boiselle upon their left rear, and were behind them in the trenches, which led from the village. By all the laws of war, the detachment was destroyed; but in practice the Germans found that they could not achieve it. A small reinforcement of 27th Northumberland Fusiliers (from the 103rd Brigade), under an experienced soldier, had joined them, and their situation was less forlorn because they were in slight touch with the skirts of the 64th Brigade of the Twenty-first Division, who had also, as will presently be shown, won a very forward position. By means of this division communication was restored with the isolated detachment, and the Colonel of the 16th Royal Scots, a very well-known volunteer officer of Edinburgh, succeeded in reaching his men. His advent gave them fresh spirit, and under his leadership they proceeded next morning not only to hold the position, but to enlarge it considerably, sending bombers down every sap and endeavouring to give the impression of great numbers. Two companies of the East Lancashire Regiment from the Nineteenth Division made their way forward, and joined with effect in these attacks. This small body of men held their own until the afternoon of July 3, when the advance of the Nineteenth Division upon La Boiselle enabled them to be relieved. It was time, for the water was exhausted and munitions were running low. It was a glad moment when, with their numerous German captives, they joined up with their cheering comrades. It should be said that in this fine feat of arms a small party of the 11th Suffolks played a valiant part. General Pulteney issued a special order thanking these troops for their stout

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defence, and the matter was in truth of wider importance than any local issue, for it had the effect of screening the left flank of the Twenty-first Division, enabling them to make good their hold upon Crucifix Trench and the Sunken Road, as will now be told.

Before leaving the Thirty-fourth Division it should be said that although La Boiselle remained untaken, the Tyneside Scots and Irish carried a number of trenches and returned with many prisoners. It has been the universal experience of our soldiers that the Germans, though excellent with their guns, and very handy with their bombs, are wanting in that spice of devilry called for in bayonet work—a quality which their ally the Turk possesses to a marked degree. In this instance, as in many others, when the Tyneside men swept roaring into the trenches the Germans either fled or threw up their hands. The condition of the prisoners was unexpectedly good. "They have new uniforms, new brown boots, leggings, and are as fat as butter," said one spectator, which is at great variance with descriptions from other parts of the line.

We have now completed our survey of that long stretch of line in which our gallant advance was broken against an equally gallant resistance. The account has necessarily had to concern itself with incessant details of units and orders of battle, since these are the very essence of such an account, and without them it might read, as contemporary descriptions did read, like some vague combat in the moon. But, casting such details aside, the reader can now glance up that long line and see the wreckage of that heroic disaster—the greatest and also the most glorious that ever befell our arms.

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CHAPTER IV

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

The Attack of the Fifteenth and Thirteenth Corps, July 1, 1916

The advance of the Twenty-first Division—64th Brigade—First permanent gains—50th Brigade at Fricourt—Advance of Seventh Division—Capture of Mametz—Fine work by Eighteenth Division—Capture of Montauban by the Thirtieth Division—General view of the battle—Its decisive importance.

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IMMEDIATELY to the south of Pulteney's Third Corps, and extending from Bécourt in the north to a point opposite Fricourt village, lay Horne's Fifteenth Corps. The general task of this Corps was to attack Mametz on the right, contain Fricourt in the centre, and attack between there and La Boiselle towards Mametz Wood. It consisted of the Twenty-first, the Seventh, and the Seventeenth Divisions. Of these, the most northerly was the Twenty-first, that fine North-country division which had so terrible an ordeal when it came up in support upon the second day of Loos. Those who held that in spite of defeat its conduct upon that occasion was soldierly, were borne out by its achievement on the Somme, where it made a lodgment in the enemy's line upon the first day, and did good service at later stages of the battle. Let us now turn our attention to its advance. It may first be mentioned that the units were the same

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as those enumerated in the description of Loos, save that in each brigade one regular battalion had been substituted. Thus the 1st Lincolns, 4th Middlesex, and 1st East Yorks took the place of the 8th East Yorks, 12th West Yorks, and 14th Durhams respectively. The 50th Brigade of the Seventeenth Division was attached to the Twenty-first Division for the purpose of the attack, and will be included with it in this summary of the operations. The rest of the Seventeenth Division was in reserve.

The attack was on a three-brigade front, the 64th Brigade upon the north, just south of La Boiselle, and in close touch with the Thirty-fourth Division. To the right of the 64th was the 63rd Brigade, and to the right of that the 50th, which advanced straight upon Fricourt. The 62nd Brigade was in reserve. It will be best to deal with the attack of the 64th Brigade with some detail, as its exploits had a very direct bearing upon the issue of the battle.

This brigade advanced upon the signal with the 10th Yorkshire Light Infantry upon the left in touch with the Royal Scots of the 101st Brigade. On their right was their 9th namesake battalion. Behind them in immediate support were the 1st East Yorks (left) and 15th Durhams (right). The advance was greatly helped by the formation of a Russian sap between the lines on which the front companies could assemble. It was found, however, upon the men advancing that the fire was so severe that they could only get forward by crawling from hole to hole, with the result that the barrage lifted before they could reach the front trenches, and the Germans were able to mount the parapet and slate them with rifle-fire. Colonel Lynch of the 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry

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was killed by a shell between trenches, as were all four captains, but the men stuck to their work and finally the leading battalions swept over the German lines, which had been greatly disorganised by the artillery, and they killed or captured the occupants with no very severe resistance. Two fixed points lay in front of the brigade, which were part of the definite objectives of the division. The first was a sunken road 1100 yards from the British front, the second was a trench 400 yards farther, on which, by the irony of Fate, a large wayside crucifix looked down, so that it was called Crucifix Trench. Beyond these on the left front were several shattered woods, Shelter Wood and Birch-tree Wood, which gave the enemy good cover, and to the right was a large ruined building, Fricourt Farm, which raked the advance with its snipers and machine-guns.

On passing the front German line the successive British waves lost their formation and clubbed together, so that a long loose line of Yorkshire and Durham men scrambled onwards into, out of and over the successive impediments, beating down all resistance as they went. When the fire became too hot, the men crawled forwards upon their stomachs or made short sharp rushes from one shell-hole to another, but the advance was steady and unbroken. The smoke from the shells was as dense as a Scotch mist. Every now and then through the haze the flashes of a machine-gun would be spied and possibly the vague figures of the German gunners as they swept it across in their deadly traverse, but a rush of furious infantry put each in turn out of action. The evidence seems to be conclusive that some at least of these gunners were found to be chained to their

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guns, which may well have happened at their own request, as a visible proof that they would never desert their post. They fired up to the last instant, and naturally they received no quarter from the stormers. Now and again the ragged line of men would stumble suddenly upon a section of proper trench, would spring down into it, clear up the occupants, and then sit in flushed, hard-breathing groups until a whistle from the officer and a cheer from their comrades would call them on once more.

In this sector there appears, however, to have been a systematic, if superficial, examination of the dug-outs before a trench was passed. One does not hear of those surprise attacks from the rear which were so common and so fatal to the north. The examination usually took the form of a sharp summons at the mouth of the burrow, quickly followed—if there were no response—by a Mills bomb. Then, as often as not, there would crawl out of the black orifice eight or ten terrified and bleeding men, who would join the numerous small convoys trailing backwards to the rear. These prisoners were nearly all from the 110th and 111th Reserve Bavarian Regiments, and the alacrity with which they made for the rear with their hands above their heads, formed the only comic touch in a tragic day. One made a grab for a rifle. "He lived about five seconds," says the narrator. "They were thin, unshaven, and terrified," says an officer, talking of the particular batch he handled. "Most had dark hair—a very different type from the Prussians."

Having overrun the German trenches, the infantry were now faced with a considerable stretch of open which lay between them and the Sunken Road,

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leading from Fricourt to Contalmaison. Many were hit upon this perilous passage. A subsidiary line of German trenches lay in front of this road, and into this the British tumbled. The Colonel of the 15th Durhams was the senior officer who had got up, and he took command at this point, rallying the weary men of all four battalions for a fresh advance. A few of the Royal Scots of the Thirty-fourth Division were found already in possession, the fringe of that body who have already been described as making so invaluable a stand at Round Wood.

At this point the 64th Brigade was found to be some distance in front of the main body of the Thirty-fourth Division on the left, and of their comrades on the right, so that they could get no farther for the moment without their flanks being badly exposed. In front through the haze they could dimly see the Crucifix which was their ultimate objective. The men had to cower low, for the bullets were coming in a continuous stream from Fricourt Farm on the right and from the woods on the left. The Sunken Road was ten or twelve feet deep at the spot, and though it was exposed at the sides, by rapid digging the men got some cover, though many dropped before they could make a shelter. Here the survivors of the advance waited for some hours, spending some of the time in ransacking the enormous thirty-foot deep dug-outs which the Germans had excavated at certain points along the side of the road. Into these the wounded were conveyed, and refreshed by the good things of life from Seltzer-water to gold-tipped cigarettes, which were found within.

In the afternoon the General Officer Commanding

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had come up as far as the Sunken Road, and had examined the position for himself. The 63rd Brigade was now well forward upon the right and the advance could be resumed. It was pushed swiftly onwards and Crucifix Trench was occupied, nearly a mile from the British front line. A lieutenant of the 9th Yorkshires, though wounded by shrapnel, seems to have been the first to lead a party into this advanced trench, but soon it was strongly occupied. The pressing need was to consolidate it, for it was swept by gusts of fire from both flanks. Another lieutenant of the Yorkshires, also a wounded man, took over the direction, and the men, with very little cover, worked splendidly to strengthen the position. Their numbers were so reduced that a counter-attack would have been most serious, but the splendid support given by the artillery held the German infantry at a distance. A few of the British tried to advance upon Shelter Wood, but the machine-guns were too active and they had to fall back or lie in shell-holes until after dark, only seventeen out of sixty getting back.

A captain of the 10th Yorkshires took over the advanced command and sent back to the colonel of the Durhams, who had meantime been wounded at the Sunken Road, to ask for instructions. The answer was to hold on and that help was at hand. This help was in the form of the 62nd Reserve Brigade, the leading battalions of which, the 1st Lincolns and 10th Yorkshire Regiment, came swinging splendidly across the open and flung themselves into Crucifix Trench. From that time the maintenance of the ground was assured. The men of the 64th Brigade who had done so finely were drawn back into the

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Sunken Road, having fully secured their objective. One cannot but marvel here, as so often elsewhere, at the fine work done by young subalterns when the senior officers have been disabled. A lieutenant of the 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry found himself in command of the whole battalion at the most critical moment of the engagement, and on leaving could only hand it over to a brother subaltern, who carried on with equal courage and ability. The brigade was drawn back to the German first line, where it lay for forty-eight hours, and finally acted as reserve brigade to the successful advance undertaken by the 62nd Brigade, by which Shelter Wood was captured on July 3.

Such, in some detail, were the adventures of the 64th Brigade, which may be taken as parallel to those of the 63rd upon the right, who were faced by much the same obstacles, having the Sunken Road ahead and the Fricourt houses upon their right. The 8th Somersets were on the left in touch with the 9th Yorkshire Light Infantry, and supported by the 8th Lincolns. On the right were the 4th Middlesex and the 10th York and Lancasters. They were able to get well up to Fricourt Farm upon the left of the village, but the ground was unfavourable and they never got as far forward as their comrades on the left. Of the German resistance on this front, it can be said that it was worthy of the reputation which the Bavarians have won in the War. The men were of splendid physique and full of courage. They fought their machine-guns to the last. All was ready for a vigorous advance next morning. The artillery of the Twenty-first Division, which has won a name for exceptional efficiency, was up nearly level

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with the infantry at 10 P.M. that night, a road having been laid in that time from the original gun position to a point half a mile inside the German front line.

On the immediate right of the 63rd Brigade, in front of Fricourt, was the 50th Brigade (Glasgow) to which was assigned the task of attacking the village while the Twenty-first Division got part of it upon the north. The brigade advanced gallantly, the front line consisting of two fine Yorkshire battalions, the 10th West Yorks and the 7th East Yorks, with part of the 7th Yor[1] shires. The attack reached and partly occupied the front trenches, but the fire and the losses were both very heavy, the 10th West Yorkshires being specially hard hit. The survivors behaved with great gallantry, and some of them held on all day, though surrounded by enemies. In the afternoon a second advance was made by Yorkshires and East Yorkshires, with 6th Dorsets in support, but again the losses were heavy and no solid foothold could be got in the village. When dusk fell some of the troops who had held their own all day were able to get back to the British trenches bringing prisoners with them. A notable example is that of a lieutenant of the West Yorks, who managed to stagger back with three wounds upon him and three Germans in front of him. The 51st Brigade was brought up in the evening to continue the assault, but with the morning of the 2nd it was found that the work had been done, and that the advance upon both flanks had caused the evacuation of the village.

The line of trenches takes a very peculiar turn just south of Fricourt, which is shown in the diagram of the battle, so that the attack of the Seventh Division, which was the next in the line, was from

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almost due south, whilst all the others had been from due west. The project was that a holding attack to engage the defenders should be made upon Mametz, whilst the remaining divisions in the line, the Seventh of the Fifteenth Corps, with the Eighteenth and Thirtieth of the Thirteenth Corps, should advance upon the line Mametz-Montauban. Their success would obviously make the position both of Fricourt and of Mametz impossible, the more so if the Twenty-first Division could maintain its position at the Sunken Road to the north of Fricourt. This was the calculation, and it worked to perfection, so that both these villages fell eventually into our hands with a minimum loss of life to the assailants. Every honour is due to the leaders who devised and to the soldiers who carried out the scheme, but it should at the same time be understood that in the case of these southern divisions, and also of the French Army of General Foch upon the right, they were attacking a portion of the line which was far less organised, and manned by very inferior troops to those in the north. All this section of attack seems to have been a complete surprise to the Germans.

The famous Seventh Division was now commanded by one of the three Brigadiers who had led it during its heroic days at Ypres. Its units, however, had changed considerably, and the 91st Brigade had taken the place of the 21st. This Brigade, consisting partly of Manchester Battalions and partly of old units of the Seventh Division (2nd Queen's Surrey, 1st South Staffords, 21st and 22nd Manchesters), attacked upon the right, while the 20th Brigade advanced upon the left, having the 2nd Gordons and 9th Devons in the van, with the 8th Devons and 2nd

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Borders in support. The front trenches were overrun without much difficulty. The order of battle was the 22nd Manchesters upon the right with the 1st South Staffords in close support. In the centre were the 2nd Gordons and upon their left the 9th Devons. The right got forward with comparatively small losses and overran the front German line. The Gordons had their left company held up by uncut wire, but got forward none the less with considerable losses. The 9th Devons were the most exposed and suffered very severely, but in spite of a casualty list which included half the officers and men, they never winced or wavered for an instant, showing what had been often shown before, that the spirit of old days still lives in the country of Drake and of Raleigh. The survivors seized and held Tirpitz Trench. The 2nd Borders had also seized Danube Support, and the whole front line was in British hands.

The 91st Brigade were now closing in upon the right of Mametz village and had entered Danzig Alley, from which they were for a time driven by a brisk counter-attack. The 1st South Staffords had won their way into the outskirts of Mametz, but the losses were heavy, and half of the 21st Manchesters came racing up to reinforce. At one o'clock the Danzig Alley had again been occupied by the Manchesters. Half the 2nd Warwicks were sent up to reinforce the Gordons and the line of infantry dashed forward upon the village, 600 of the enemy throwing up their hands in front of them. The 20th Manchesters also advanced, losing heavily by the fire from Fricourt, but pushing on as far as the Sunken Road on the extreme left of the advance. There is a tangle of trenches at this point, the chief

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of which is the Rectangle, but with the aid of the 1st Welsh Fusiliers they were all cleared and the flank of the Division made good, and consolidated since it had advanced farther than the troops to the left. In the morning, however, when it was found that Fricourt had been evacuated, the whole Division was able to get forward and by July 3 had occupied Bottom Wood, while the 2nd Royal Irish had actually penetrated Mametz Wood, taking 2 guns and 50 prisoners. Some days later, Mametz Wood had become a different proposition, but the general orders at the time were that it should not be seriously attacked.

Altogether in these Mametz operations the Seventh Division took 1500 prisoners, seven field-guns and much booty of different kinds.

We have now recorded in succession the repulse of the Seventh Corps at Gommecourt, that of the Eighth Corps at Serre and Beaumont Hamel, and that of the Tenth Corps at Thiepval. The record of heroic disaster was then alleviated by the partial success of the Third Corps at La Boiselle, the considerable success of the Fifteenth Corps at Mametz, and now by the complete success of the Thirteenth Corps at Montauban. South of this point along the whole French line the victory was never in doubt. These latter operations do not come within the direct scope of this narrative, though some short account must be given of them later, in order to co-ordinate the results of the two wings of the Allied Armies.

The Thirteenth Corps was commanded by General Congreve, who, it will be remembered, gained his V.C. in the affair of the guns where young Roberts met his death at Colenso. It consisted of the Eighteenth, the Thirtieth, and the Ninth Divisions of the

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New Army. Of these the Eighteenth was on the left in touch with the victorious Seventh, the Thirtieth was on the right in touch with the French, and the Ninth, the Scottish Division which had done such great work at Loos, was in reserve.

The Eighteenth Division, which had done no serious fighting before, established a remarkable record for good service during the whole course of the Somme battle, into which it was thrust again and again, never without leaving its mark. It was entirely an English division. Some complex and successful trench-digging had been done on this part of the front. Eight covered saps had been driven forward and reached a point within twenty yards of the German trenches without their knowledge. Upon the advance being ordered the ends of these were opened up, machine-guns and flame-throwers were thrust through, and the saps behind were quickly unroofed and turned into communication trenches. It was a variant of the device adopted in the Eighth Division, and was superior to it in that its success did not depend upon the actual capture of the trench.

The front of the attack was about 2500 yards, and it was carried out by three brigades abreast, each covering about 700 yards. Each brigade had two battalions in front, one in support and one in reserve. Each was also allotted its own particular artillery apart from the general divisional artillery. There are many good arguments for such a formation of divisional attack, as compared with the two-brigades-in-front and one-in-the-rear formation. Upon this occasion, at any rate, it worked very smoothly. The objectives were from the immediate western end of Montauban upon the right, along

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Montauban Alley to a point east of Mametz where they should touch the right units of the Seventh Division.

Of the three brigades the 55th was on the right, the 53rd in the centre, and the 54th on the left. In accordance with the general scheme of description we will begin with the latter.

The 54th Brigade had the 7th Bedford on the right, the 11th Royal Fusiliers on the left, the 6th Northants in support, and the 12th Middlesex in reserve. As they rushed forward they faced a feeble barrage, but a heavy machine-gun fire. It was found, however, here, and along the whole divisional front, that the German wire was utterly destroyed, thanks largely to the work of the trench mortars which had supplanted field-guns for this particular purpose. The first trenches were taken without a pause, and parties remained behind to clear out the dug-outs.

"Cowering in the trench," says one of the stormers, "clad in the pale grey uniforms we had longed for twelve months to see, unarmed and minus equipment, with fear written on their faces, were a few of those valiant warriors of the Kaiser whose prowess we were out to dispute. Here let me say that the exact moment selected for our attack had taken the Huns by surprise. This view was subsequently confirmed by prisoners, who said that they had expected us earlier in the day and had since stood down." This idea of a surprise only refers of course to the front trench. Soon the fighting grew very severe.

The first serious check was in front of a strong point called the Pommiers Redoubt. The wire here had been invisible from long grass so that its pres-

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ence was a surprise. Again and again the machine-guns swept away the leading files of the attack. The redoubt could be outflanked, however, and an officer of the Fusiliers brought his bombers round and eventually to the rear of it. Snipers held him for a time, but they were rushed by an officer and a few men. The Germans still held bravely to their point, but Bedfords and Fusiliers swarmed in upon them until their arms went down and their hands up. From this strong point bombing parties were sent down the communication trenches, the infantry following closely and occupying the new ground.

The brigade was now in some danger from its own success, for it had outrun the 91st Brigade of the Seventh Division upon its left, and its own comrades of the 53rd Brigade upon its right. The 6th Northants held the defensive flank on the left. Later in the day the 53rd came into line upon the right and before dark the 54th was able to move on again with little resistance until it had reached its full objective at Montauban Alley.

The 53rd Brigade was on the right of the 54th. Its assaulting line was formed by the 8th Norfolk upon the right, and the 6th Berkshires upon the left, with the 10th Essex in support and the 8th Suffolk in reserve. The first two lines were taken in their stride with little loss. A strong point behind these lines held them up for a short time, but was rushed, and its garrison of the 109th Regiment was captured. Further progress of the Norfolks was made difficult, however, by a flanking fire and by a second redoubt in front. As in the case of the 53rd Brigade it was found that the way round is often the shorter. Two bombing parties under gallant subalterns worked up

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the trenches on the flank, while that murderous weapon, a Stokes gun, was brought up and opened fire. The combined effect was decisive and 150 Germans threw down their arms. Sixty more were taken in another redoubt to the left.

Whilst the Norfolks had been fighting their way forward in this fashion the Berkshires upon their left, following very closely upon their own barrage, had attained their objective in twenty minutes, and had to hold it for some hours until the Norfolks had made good. During this time their right flank was necessarily exposed. This flank was defended successfully by means of bombing parties and a Lewis gun, while the left company instead of resting lent a hand to their neighbours of the 54th Brigade in carrying Pommiers Redoubt.

Meanwhile the Norfolks had come ahead again, but the advance of the Berkshires was held up by a small but determined band of bombers and snipers in a strong position. A Stokes mortar drove back the bombers, but the snipers still held fast, and killed in succession Lieutenant Rushton and Lieutenant Saye who gallantly attacked them. A sergeant-major of the Berkshires was more fortunate, however, and killed the chief sniper whose automatic rifle had played the part of a machine-gun. In doing so he was severely wounded himself. The Essex had come up into the firing line, but progress was still slow until an invaluable Stokes mortar was again brought to bear and with its shower of heavy bombs blasted the strong point out of existence. When night fell the whole line of Montauban Alley had been successfully won and the various units were in close touch and were busily organising their position.

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Great obstinacy was shown by the Germans in their defence, which was a gallant one, and might well have been successful against a less skilful attack. Among other instances of their tenacity was one in which a sniper in a trench behind the stormers continued to fire from some subterranean retreat and defied all efforts to get at him, until it was found necessary to blow in the whole face of the dug-out and so to bury him within his own stronghold.

The hardest fighting of any fell to the lot of the 55th Brigade upon the right. The advance was made with the 8th East Surrey and 7th Queen's Surrey in front, the latter to the left. The 7th Buffs were in support and the 7th West Kents in reserve. No sooner had the troops come out from cover than they were met by a staggering fire which held them up in the Breslau Trench. The supports had soon to be pushed up to thicken the ranks of the East Surrey—a battalion which, with the ineradicable sporting instinct and light-heartedness of the Londoner, had dribbled footballs, one for each platoon, across No Man's Land and shot their goal in the front line trench. A crater had been formed by a mine explosion, forming a gap in the German front, and round this crater a fierce fight raged for some time, the Germans rushing down a side sap which brought them up to the fray. Into this side sap sprang an officer and a sergeant of the Buffs, and killed 12 of the Germans, cutting off their flow of reinforcements, while half a company of the same battalion cleared up the crater and captured a machine-gun which had fought to the last cartridge. It is worth recording that in the case of one of these machine-guns the gunner was actually found with a four-foot

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chain attaching him to the tripod. Being badly wounded and unable to disengage himself the wretched man had dragged himself, his wound, and his tripod for some distance before being captured by the British. The fact was duly established by a sworn inquiry.

The brigade was winning its way forward, but the hard resistance of the Germans had delayed it to such a point, that there was a danger that it would not be in its place so as to cover the left flank of the 90th Brigade, who were due to attack Montauban at 10 A.M. Such a failure might make the difference between victory and defeat. At this critical moment the officer commanding the East Surreys dashed to the front, re-formed his own men with all whom he could collect and led them onwards. Captain Neville was killed in gallantly leading the rush, but the wave went forward. There was check after check, but the point had to be won, and the Suffolks of the 53rd Brigade were brought round to strengthen the attack, while the West Kents were pushed forward to the fighting line. By mid-day two platoons of West Kents were into Montauban Alley, and had seized two houses on the western end of Montauban, which were rapidly fortified by a section of the 92nd Field Company. The flank of the 90th was assured. A South African officer led the first group of Surrey men who seized Montauban. He is said during the action to have slain seventeen of the enemy.

The rest of the brigade, however, had desperate work to get into line with the village. The East Surreys and Buffs were coming along well, but the Queen's Surreys had lost heavily and were held up by a strong point called Back Trench. A major of

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the Queen's gathered his men together, called up a bombing party from the 8th Sussex, the pioneer battalion of the brigade, and then by a united front and flank attack carried the position. One hundred and seventy Germans remained alive in the trench. The infantry then surged forward to the line of the Mametz-Montauban Road, where they lay under machine-gun fire with their left in the air, for a considerable gap had developed between them and the 53rd Brigade. The main line of Montauban Alley in front of them was still strongly held by the enemy.

Once again the Stokes guns saved what looked like a dangerous situation. They blasted a hole in Montauban Alley, and through the hole rushed a furious storming party of the Queen's. As evening fell, after that long day of fighting, the weary Eighteenth Division, splendid soldiers, splendidly led, held the whole line from Montauban to the junction with the Seventh Division near Mametz. One does not know which to admire most—the able dispositions, the inflexible resolution of the troops, or the elastic adaptability which enabled the initiative of the officers upon the spot to use ever-varying means for getting over the successive difficulties. The losses were very heavy, amounting to about 3000 officers and men, something under 1000 being fatal. Of the Germans 700 were captured, 1200 were buried after the action, and the total loss could not possibly have been less than those incurred by the British. It should be added that a great deal of the success of the attack was due to the 82nd, 83rd, 84th, and 85th Brigades, Royal Field Artillery, forming the divisional artillery, who earned the earnest gratitude of

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the infantry, the highest reward to which the gunner can attain. Some of the artillery of the Ninth Division was also engaged.

A few words may be said of the immediate future of the Eighteenth Division before the narrative of July 1 is completed by a consideration of the work of the Thirtieth Division. The ground captured included part of what may be called the Montauban Ridge, and the possession of this point proved to be of great service for observation in connection with the immediate operations at Bottom, Shelter, and Mametz Woods by the Fifteenth Corps. The guns were at once advanced and patrols were thrown out in front which penetrated and eventually occupied Caterpillar Wood, a long winding plantation on the immediate front of the Division. These various patrols picked up no less than twelve German field-guns abandoned by the enemy. The front was held until July 8, when the Eighteenth was relieved by the Third Division.

As to the fighting of the Germans upon this front, it was excellent as usual—but it is needful to accentuate it, as there is a tendency to depreciate the enemy at a point where he is beaten, which is an injustice to the victors. The latter had no doubts about the matter. "There is one thing we have all learned and that is that the Hun is a jolly good soldier and engineer, so don't listen to any other nonsense. If you get hand-to-hand with him he gives in at once, but he practically never lets you get so close. As long as Fritz has a trench and a gun he will stick there till he is made crows' rations. We know we are just slightly better than he is, but there's nothing much in it—nothing to justify con-

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tempt or liberties." Such was the considered opinion of an experienced soldier.

If the advance of the Eighteenth Division was successful, that of the Thirtieth upon its right was not less so. This division had been raised originally from Liverpool and Manchester, the battalions being all of the King's Liverpool or of the Manchester Regiments. The greater part of these battalions, which owe their origin largely to that great patriot, Lord Derby, were recruited on the "pal" system, by which friends in peace should be comrades in war. So close was Lord Derby's connection with the division that his brother commanded one brigade, and three of his family served with the guns, one of them commanding an artillery unit. This was the first appearance of this fine force in actual battle, and it can truly be said that no division could have been more fortunate or have given a better account of itself. It may be explained that it had exchanged its 91st Brigade for the 21st of the Seventh Division, and that several of the veteran battalions of the old Seventh now served with the Thirtieth.

The objective of this division was the important village of Montauban deep within the enemy's line. It seemed an ambitious mark in a war where every yard means an effort, but it was accomplished with surprising ease, for the advance was as determined as the defence was slack. On the right opposite Maricourt the attack fell to the 89th Brigade, consisting of the 2nd Bedfords and the 17th, 19th, and 20th King's Liverpool battalions. On their left was the 21st Brigade, while the 90th Brigade was in immediate support with orders to go through and seize the village itself. From the start the attack went

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