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MONDAY, 1 NOVEMBER, 1915.

War Office,
1st November, 1915.

The following despatch has been received by the Secretary of State for War from the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief, The British Army in France:—

General Headquarters,
British Army in France.
15th October, 1915.

MY LORD,

I have the honour to report the operations of the Forces under my command since the date of those described in my last despatch dated 15th June, 1915.

1. Those of the greatest importance took place during the last days of the period under report. Nevertheless, the Army under my command was constantly engaged throughout the whole time in enterprises which, although not securing the same important results, have yet had considerable influence on the course of events.

2. On 2nd June the enemy made a final offensive in the Ypres salient with the object

of gaining our trenches and position at Hooge. The attack was most determined and was preceded by a severe bombardment. A gallant defence was made by troops of the 3rd Cavalry Division and 1st Indian Cavalry Division, and our position was maintained throughout.

During the first weeks of June the front of the Second Army was extended to the North as far as the village of Boesinghe.

3. After the conclusion of the Battle of Festubert the troops of the First Army were engaged in several minor operations.

By an attack delivered on the evening of 15th June after a prolonged bombardment the 1st Canadian Brigade obtained possession of the German front line trenches north-east of Givenchy, but were unable to retain them owing to their flanks being too much exposed.

4. On 16th June an attack was carried out by the 5th Corps on the Bellewaarde Ridge, east of Ypres.

The enemy's front line was captured, many of his dead and wounded being found in the trenches.

The troops, pressing forward, gained ground as far East as the Bellewaarde Lake, but found themselves unable to maintain this advanced

position. They were, however, successful in securing and consolidating the ground won during the first part of the attack, on a front of a thousand yards, including the advanced portion of the enemy's salient north of the Ypres-Menin Road.

During this action the fire of the artillery was most effective, the prisoners testifying to its destructiveness and accuracy. It also prevented the delivery of counter attacks, which were paralysed at the outset.

Over two hundred prisoners were taken, besides some machine-guns, trench material and gas apparatus.

Holding attacks by the neighbouring 2nd and 6th Corps were successful in helping the main attack, whilst the 36th French Corps co-operated very usefully with artillery fire on Pilkem.

Near Hill 60 the 15th Infantry Brigade made four bombing attacks, gaining and occupying about fifty yards of trench.

On 6th July a small attack was made by the 11th Infantry Brigade on a German salient between Boesinghe and Ypres, which resulted in the capture of a frontage of about 500 yards of trench and a number of prisoners.

In the course of this operation it was necessary to move a gun of the 135th Battery, Royal Field Artillery, into the front line to destroy an enemy sap-head. To reach its position the gun had to be taken over a high canal embankment, rafted over the canal under fire, pulled up a bank with a slope of nearly 45 degrees, and then dragged over three trenches and a sky line to its position seventy yards from the German lines. This was carried out without loss.

This incident is of minor importance in itself, but I quote it as an example of the daily difficulties which officers and men in the trenches are constantly called upon to overcome, and of the spirit of initiative and resource which is so marked a feature amongst them.

From the 10th to the 12th July the enemy made attempts, after heavy shelling, to recapture the lost portion of their line; but our artillery, assisted by that of the French on our left, prevented any serious assault from being delivered. Minor attacks were constant, but were easily repulsed by the garrison of our trenches.

On 19th July an enemy's redoubt at the western end of the Hooze defences was successfully mined and destroyed, and a small portion of the enemy's trenches was captured.

5. Since my last despatch a new device has been adopted by the enemy for driving burning liquid into our trenches with a strong jet.

Thus supported, an attack was made on the trenches of the Second Army at Hooze, on the Menin Road, early on 30th July. Most of the infantry occupying these trenches were driven back, but their retirement was due far more to the surprise and temporary confusion caused by the burning liquid than to the actual damage inflicted.

Gallant endeavours were made by repeated counter attacks to recapture the lost section of trenches. These, however, proving unsuccessful and costly, a new line of trenches was consolidated a short distance further back.

Attacks made by the enemy at the same time west of Bellewaarde Lake were repulsed.

On 9th August these losses were brilliantly regained, owing to a successful attack carried

out by the 6th Division. This attack was very well executed and resulted in the recapture, with small casualties, not only of the whole of the lost trenches, but, in addition, of four hundred yards of German trench north of the Menin Road.

At the end of this engagement it was estimated that between four and five hundred German dead were lying on the battlefield.

Valuable help was rendered by two batteries of French artillery lent by General Hely d'Oissel, commanding 36th French Corps.

6. From the conclusion of the above-mentioned operations until the last week in September there was relative quiet along the whole of the British line, except at those points where the normal conditions of existence comprised occasional shelling or constant mine and bomb warfare. In these trying forms of encounter all ranks have constantly shown the greatest enterprise and courage, and have consistently maintained the upper hand.

The close accord and co-operation which has always existed between the Commander-in-Chief of our Allies and myself has been maintained, and I have had constant meetings with General Joffre, who has kept me informed of his views and intentions, and explained the successive methods by which he hopes to attain his ultimate object.

After full discussion of the military situation a decision was arrived at for joint action, in which I acquiesced.

It was arranged that we should make a combined attack from certain points of the Allied line during the last week in September.

The reinforcements I have received enabled me to comply with several requests which General Joffre has made that I should take over additional portions of the French line.

7. In fulfilment of the rôle assigned to it in these operations the Army under my command attacked the enemy on the morning of the 25th September.

The main attack was delivered by the 1st and 4th Corps between the La Bassée Canal on the north and a point of the enemy's line opposite the village of Grenay on the south.

At the same time a secondary attack, designed with the object of distracting the enemy's attention and holding his troops to their ground, was made by the 5th Corps on Bellewaarde Farm, situated to the east of Ypres. Subsidiary attacks with similar objects were delivered by the 3rd and Indian Corps north of the La Bassée Canal and along the whole front of the Second Army.

The object of the secondary attack by the 5th Corps was most effectively achieved, for not only was the enemy contained on that front, but we have reason to believe that reserves were hurried toward that point of the line.

The attack was made at daybreak by the 3rd and 14th Divisions, and at first the greater part of the enemy's front line was taken; but, owing to the powerful artillery fire concentrated against them, the troops were unable to retain the ground, and had to return to their original trenches toward nightfall. The 5th Corps succeeded, however, in capturing two officers and 138 other prisoners.

Similar demonstrations with equally good results were made along the whole front of the Second Army.

With the same object in view, those units of the First Army occupying the line north of the

Bethune-La Bassée Canal were detailed to carry out some minor operations.

Portions of the 1st Corps assaulted the enemy's trenches at Givenchy. The Indian Corps attacked the Moulin du Piétre; while the 3rd Corps was directed against the trenches at Le Bridoux.

These attacks started at daybreak and were at first successful all along the line. Later in the day the enemy brought up strong reserves, and after hard fighting and variable fortunes the troops engaged in this part of the line re-occupied their original trenches at nightfall. They succeeded admirably, however, in fulfilling the rôle allotted to them, and in holding large numbers of the enemy away from the main attack.

The 8th Division of the 3rd Corps and the Meerut Division of the Indian Corps were principally engaged in this part of the line.

On the front of the Third Army subsidiary operations of a similar nature were successfully carried out.

The Wing of the Royal Flying Corps attached to this Army performed valuable work by undertaking distant flights behind the enemy's lines and by successfully blowing up railways, wrecking trains and damaging stations on his line of communication by means of bomb attacks.

Valuable assistance was rendered by Vice-Admiral Bacon and a squadron of His Majesty's ships operating off Zeebrugge and Ostend.

8. The general plan of the main attack on the 25th September was as follows:—

In co-operation with an offensive movement by the 10th French Army on our right, the 1st and 4th Corps were to attack the enemy from a point opposite the little mining village of Grenay on the south to the La Bassée Canal on the north. The Vermelles-Hulluch Road was to be the dividing line between the two Corps, the 4th Corps delivering the right attack, the 1st Corps the left.

In view of the great length of line along which the British troops were operating it was necessary to keep a strong reserve in my own hand. The 11th Corps, consisting of the Guards, the 21st and the 24th Divisions, were detailed for this purpose.

This reserve was the more necessary owing to the fact that the 10th French Army had to postpone its attack until one o'clock in the day; and, further, that the Corps operating on the French left had to be directed in a more or less south-easterly direction, involving, in case of our success, a considerable gap in our line.

To ensure, however, the speedy and effective support to the 1st and 4th Corps in the case of their success, the 21st and 24th Divisions passed the night of the 24th/25th on the line Beuvry (to the east of Bethune)-Noeux les Mines. The Guards Division was in the neighbourhood of Lillers on the same night.

I also directed the General Officer Commanding Second Army to draw the 28th Division back to Bailleul and to hold it in readiness to meet unexpected eventualities.

The British Cavalry Corps, less 3rd Cavalry Division, under General Fanshawe, was posted in the neighbourhood of St. Pol and Bailleul les Pernes; and the Indian Cavalry Corps, under General Rimington, at Doullens; both in readiness to co-operate with the French Cavalry in exploiting any success which might

be attained by the combined French and British Forces. Plans for effective co-operation were fully arranged between the Cavalry Commanders of both Armies.

The 3rd Cavalry Division, less one brigade, was assigned to the General Officer Commanding First Army as a reserve, and moved into the area of the 4th Corps on the 21st and 22nd September.

9. Opposite the front of the main line of attack the distance between the enemy's trenches and our own varied from about 100 to 500 yards.

The country over which the advance took place is open and overgrown with long grass and self-sown crops.

From the canal southward our trenches and those of the enemy ran, roughly, parallel up an almost imperceptible rise to the south-west.

From the Vermelles-Hulluch Road southward the advantage of height is on the enemy's side as far as the Bethune-Lens Road. There the two lines of trenches cross a spur in which the rise culminates, and thence the command lies on the side of the British trenches.

Due east of the intersection of spur and trenches, and a short mile away, stands Loos. Less than a mile further south-east is Hill 70, which is the summit of the gentle rise in the ground.

Other notable tactical points in our front were:—

"*Fosse 8*" (a thousand yards south of Auchy), which is a coal mine with a high and strongly defended slag heap.

"*The Hohenzollern Redoubt*."—A strong work thrust out nearly five hundred yards in front of the German lines and close to our own. It is connected with their front line by three communication trenches abutting into the defences of *Fosse 8*.

Cité St. Elie.—A strongly defended mining village lying fifteen hundred yards south of Haisnes.

"*The Quarries*."—Lying half way to the German trenches west of *Cité St. Elie*.

Hulluch.—A village strung out along a small stream, lying less than half a mile south-east of *Cité St. Elie* and 3,000 yards north-east of Loos.

Half a mile north of Hill 70 is "*Puits 14 bis*," another coal mine, possessing great possibilities for defence when taken in conjunction with a strong redoubt situated on the north-east side of Hill 70.

10. The attacks of the 1st and 4th Corps were delivered at 6.30 a.m. and were successful all along the line, except just south of the La Bassée Canal.

The enemy met the advance by wild infantry fire of slight intensity, but his artillery fire was accurate and caused considerable casualties.

The 47th Division on the right of the 4th Corps rapidly swung its left forward and occupied the southern outskirts of Loos and a big double slag heap opposite Grenay, known as the Double Crassier. Thence it pushed on, and, by taking possession of the cemetery, the enclosures and chalk pits south of Loos, succeeded in forming a strong defensive flank.

This London Territorial Division acquitted itself most creditably. It was skilfully led and the troops carried out their task with great energy and determination. They contributed largely to our success in this part of the field.

On the left of the 47th Division a Scottish Division of the New Armies (15th Division) assaulted Loos, Hill 70 and Fosse 14 bis.

The attack was admirably delivered, and in a little more than an hour parts of the division occupied Loos and its northern outskirts, Puits 14 bis and Hill 70, whilst some units had pushed on as far as Cité St. Auguste, a mile east of Hill 70.

The 15th Division carried out its advance with the greatest vigour, in spite of its left flank being exposed, owing to the 1st Division on its left having been checked.

About 1 p.m. the enemy brought up strong reserves, and the advanced portions of the division at Fosse 14 bis and on the far side of Hill 70 were driven in. We had, however, secured the very substantial gain of Loos and the western portion of Hill 70.

11. At 9.30 a.m. I placed the 21st and 24th Divisions at the disposal of the General Officer commanding First Army, who at once ordered the General Officer commanding the 11th Corps to move them up in support of the attacking troops.

Between 11 a.m. and 12 noon the central brigades of these divisions filed past me at Bethune and Noeux les Mines respectively. At 11.30 a.m. the heads of both divisions were within three miles of our original trench line.

As the success of the 47th Division on the right of the 4th Corps caused me less apprehension of a gap in our line near that point, I ordered the Guards Division up to Noeux les Mines, and the 28th Division to move in a southerly direction from Bailleul.

12. The 1st Division, attacking on the left of the 15th, was unable at first to make any headway with its right brigade.

The brigade on its left (the 1st) was, however, able to get forward and penetrated into the outskirts of the village of Hulluch, capturing some gun positions on the way.

The determined advance of this brigade, with its right flank dangerously exposed, was most praiseworthy, and, combined with the action of divisional reserves, was instrumental in causing the surrender of a German detachment some 500 strong which was holding up the advance of the right brigade in the front system of trenches.

The inability of the right of this division to get forward had, however, caused sufficient delay to enable the enemy to collect local reserves behind the strong second line.

The arrangements, the planning and execution of the attack, and the conduct of the troops of the 4th Corps were most efficient and praiseworthy.

13. In the attack of the 1st Corps the 7th Division was directed on the Quarries. The 9th Division was to capture the Hohenzollern Redoubt and then to push on to Fosse 8.

The assault of the 7th Division succeeded at once, and in a very short time they had reached the western edge of the Quarries, Cité St. Elie and even the village of Haisnes, the tendency of the action having been to draw the troops northward.

On the right of the 9th Division the 26th Brigade secured Fosse 8 after heavy fighting, and the 28th Brigade captured the front line of the German trenches east of Vermelles railway. At the latter point the fighting was extremely severe; and this brigade, suffering

considerable losses, was driven back to its own trenches.

At nightfall, after a heavy day's fighting and numerous German counter attacks, the line was, roughly, as follows:—

From the Double Crassier, south of Loos, by the western part of Hill 70, to the western end of Hulluch; thence by the Quarries and western end of Cité St. Elie, east of Fosse 8, back to our original line.

Throughout the length of the line heavy fighting was in progress, and our hold on Fosse 8, backed as it is by the strong defences and guns of Auchy, was distinctly precarious.

Heavy rain fell throughout the day, which was very detrimental to efficient observation of fire and reconnaissance by aircraft.

In the course of the night 25th/26th September the enemy delivered a series of heavy counter attacks along most of our new front. The majority of these were repulsed with heavy loss; but in parts of the line, notably near the Quarries, our troops were driven back a certain distance.

At 6 p.m. the Guards Division arrived at Noeux les Mines, and on the morning of the 26th I placed them at the disposal of the General Officer commanding First Army.

14. The situation at the Quarries, described above, was re-adjusted by an attack of the 7th Division on the afternoon of September 26th; and on that evening very heavy attacks delivered by the enemy were repulsed with severe loss.

On the 4th Corps front attacks on Hulluch and on the redoubt on the east side of Hill 70 were put in operation, but were anticipated by the enemy organising a very strong offensive from that direction. These attacks drove in the advanced troops of the 21st and 24th Divisions, which were then moving forward to attack.

Reports regarding this portion of the action are very conflicting, and it is not possible to form an entirely just appreciation of what occurred in this part of the field.

At nightfall there was no change up to Hill 70, except for a small gain of ground south of Loos. From Hill 70 the line bent sharply back to the north-west as far as Loos-La Bassée Road, which it followed for a thousand yards, bearing thence north-eastward to near the west end of Hulluch. Thence northward it was the same as it had been on the previous night.

The night of September 26th/27th was as disturbed as the previous night, for many further counter attacks were made and constant pressure was maintained by the enemy.

A dismounted cavalry brigade was thrown into Loos to form a garrison.

On this day I placed the 28th Division at the disposal of the General Officer commanding First Army.

I regret to say that Major-General Sir Thompson Capper, K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O., commanding 7th Division, was severely wounded on the 26th, and died on the morning of the 27th. He was a most distinguished and capable leader, and his loss will be severely felt.

15. Soon after dawn on the 27th it became apparent that the brigade holding Fosse 8 was unable to maintain its position, and eventually it was slowly forced back until at length our front at this point coincided with the eastern portion of the Hohenzollern Redoubt.

I regret to say that during this operation Major-General G. H. Thesiger, C.B., C.M.G., A.D.C., commanding the 9th Division, was killed whilst most gallantly endeavouring to secure the ground which had been won.

In the afternoon of this day the Guards Division, which had taken over part of the line to the north of the 4th Corps, almost restored our former line, bringing it up parallel to and slightly west of the Lens-La Bassée Road.

This Division made a very brilliant and successful attack on Hill 70 in the afternoon. They drove the Germans off the top of the hill, but could not take the redoubt, which is on the north-east slopes below the crest. They also took the Chalk Pit which lies north of Puits 14, and all the adjacent woods, but were unable to maintain themselves in the Puits itself, which was most effectively commanded by well-posted machine-guns.

The 47th Division on the right of the Guards captured a wood further to the south and repulsed a severe hostile counter attack.

The 28th was passed in consolidating the ground gained and in making a certain number of internal moves of divisions, in order to give the troops rest and to enable those units whose casualties had been heavy to refill their ranks with reinforcements.

The 47th Division made a little more ground to the south, capturing one field gun and a few machine-guns.

On the evening of this day the situation remained practically unchanged.

16. The line occupied by the troops of the First Army south of the canal became now very much extended by the salient with which it indented the enemy's line.

The French 10th Army had been very heavily opposed, and I considered that the advance they were able to make did not afford sufficient protection to my right flank.

On representing this to General Joffre he was kind enough to ask the Commander of the northern group of French Armies to render me assistance.

General Foch met these demands in the same friendly spirit which he has always displayed throughout the course of the whole campaign, and expressed his readiness to give me all the support he could.

On the morning of the 28th we discussed the situation, and the General agreed to send the 9th French Corps to take over the ground occupied by us extending from the French left up to and including that portion of Hill 70 which we were holding, and also the village of Loos.

This relief was commenced on the 30th September and completed on the two following nights.

17. During the 29th and 30th September and the first days of October fighting was almost continuous along the northern part of the new line, particularly about the Hohenzollern Redoubt and neighbouring trenches, to which the enemy evidently attached great value. His attacks, however, invariably broke down with very heavy loss under the accurate fire of our infantry and artillery.

The Germans succeeded in gaining some ground in and about the Hohenzollern Redoubt but they paid heavily for it in the losses they suffered.

Our troops all along the front were busily engaged in consolidating and strengthening

the ground won, and the efficient and thorough manner in which this work was carried out reflects the greatest credit upon all ranks. Every precaution was made to deal with the counter attack which was inevitable.

During these operations the weather has been most unfavourable, and the troops have had to fight in rain and mud and often in darkness. Even these adverse circumstances have in no way affected the magnificent spirit continually displayed alike by officers and men. In the Casualty Clearing and Dressing Stations; of which I visited a great number during the course of the action, I found nothing but the most cheery optimism among the wounded.

I have to deplore the loss of a third most valuable and distinguished General of Division during these operations.

On the afternoon of 2nd October Major-General F. D. V. Wing, C.B., commanding the 12th Division, was killed.

18. On the afternoon of 8th October our expectations in regard to a counter attack were fulfilled. The enemy directed a violent and intense attack all along the line from Fosse 8 on the north to the right of the French 9th Corps on the south. The attack was delivered by some twenty-eight battalions in first line, with larger forces in support, and was prepared by a very heavy bombardment from all parts of the enemy's front.

At all parts of the line except two the Germans were repulsed with tremendous loss, and it is computed on reliable authority that they left some eight to nine thousand dead lying on the battlefield in front of the British and French trenches.

On the right the attack succeeded in making a small and unimportant lodgment on the Double Crassier held by the French; whilst on the left the trench held by troops of the Guards Division to the north-east of the Hohenzollern Redoubt was temporarily captured. The latter was, however, speedily retaken, and at midnight on the 9th October the line held by the First Army was identically the same as that held before the enemy's attack started.

The main enemy attacks on the front held by our troops had been against the 1st Division in the neighbourhood of the Chalk Pit and the Guards Division in the neighbourhood of the Hohenzollern Redoubt. Both attacks were repulsed, and the enemy lost heavily from machine-gun and artillery fire.

From subsequent information it transpired that the German attack was made by about twelve battalions against the line Loos-Chalk Pit, and that a subsidiary attack by six to eight battalions was made from the direction of the Hohenzollern Redoubt against the Guards Division.

Some eight or ten German battalions were directed against the French 9th Corps.

19. The position assaulted and carried with so much brilliancy and dash by the 1st and 4th Corps on 25th September was an exceptionally strong one. It extended along a distance of some 6,500 yards, consisted of a double line, which included works of considerable strength, and was a network of trenches and bomb-proof shelters. Some of the dug-outs and shelters formed veritable caves thirty feet below the ground, with almost impenetrable

head cover. The enemy had expended months of labour upon perfecting these defences.

The total number of prisoners captured during these operations amounted to 57 officers and 3,000 other ranks. Material which fell into our hands included 26 field-guns, 40 machine-guns and 3 minenwerfer.

I deeply regret the heavy casualties which were incurred in this battle, but in view of the great strength of the position, the stubborn defence of the enemy and the powerful artillery by which he was supported, I do not think they were excessive. I am happy to be able to add that the proportion of slightly wounded is relatively very large indeed.

20. Since the date of my last despatch the Army has received strong reinforcements, and every reinforcement has had its quota of Field Artillery. In addition, numerous batteries of heavy guns and howitzers have been added to the strength of the heavy artillery. The arrival of these reinforcements in the field has tested the capacity of the Artillery as a whole to expand to meet the requirements of the Army, and to maintain the high level of efficiency that has characterised this arm throughout the campaign. Our enemy may have hoped, not perhaps without reason, that it would be impossible for us, starting from such small beginnings, to build up an efficient Artillery to provide for the very large expansion of the Army. If he entertained such hopes, he has now good reason to know that they have not been justified by the result.

The efficiency of the Artillery of the New Armies has exceeded all expectations, and during the period under review excellent services have been rendered by the Territorial Artillery.

The necessity to denude the old batteries of Regular Horse and Field Artillery of officers and non-commissioned officers, in order to provide for the expansion referred to, has not in any way impaired their efficiency, and they continue to set an example to all by their high standard and devotion to duty.

I must give a special word of praise to the officers and rank and file of the Royal Garrison Artillery for the admirable way in which they have accustomed themselves to the conditions of active service in the field, to which for the most part they were unaccustomed, and for the manner in which they have applied their general knowledge of gunnery to the special problems arising in trench warfare. The excellence of their training and the accuracy of their shooting have, I feel sure, made a marked impression on the enemy.

21. The work of the Artillery during the daily life in the trenches calls for increasing vigilance and the maintenance of an intricate system of communications in a thorough state of efficiency, in order that the guns may be ever ready to render assistance to the Infantry when necessity arises. A high standard of initiative is also required in order to maintain the moral ascendancy over the enemy, by impeding his working parties, destroying his works and keeping his artillery fire under control.

To the many calls upon them the Artillery has responded in a manner that is altogether admirable.

In the severe offensive actions that have taken place it is not too much to say that the first element of success has been the artillery preparation of the attack. Only when this

preparation has been thorough have our attacks succeeded. It is impossible to convey in a despatch an adequate impression of the amount of care and labour involved in the minute and exact preparations that are the necessary preliminaries of a bombardment preparatory to an attack in a modern battle.

The immense number of guns that it is necessary to concentrate, the amount of ammunition to be supplied to them, and the diversity of the tasks to be carried out, demand a very high order of skill in organisation and technical professional knowledge.

22. The successful attacks at Hooze on 9th August and of the First Army on 25th September show that our Artillery officers possess the necessary talents and the rank and file the necessary skill and endurance to ensure success in operations of this character.

Moreover, the repulse of the enemy's attack on 8th October in the neighbourhood of Loos and Hulluch with such heavy losses shows the capacity of the Artillery to concentrate its fire promptly and effectively at a moment's notice for the defence of the front.

I cannot close these remarks on the Artillery without expressing my admiration for the work of the observing officers and the men who work with them. Carrying out their duties, as they do, in close proximity to the front line in observing stations that are the special mark of the enemy's guns, they are constantly exposed to fire, and are compelled to carry on their work, involving the use of delicate instruments and the making of nice calculations, in circumstances of the greatest difficulty and danger. That they have never failed in their duties, and that they have suffered very heavy casualties in performing them, are to their lasting credit and honour.

The work of the Artillery in co-operation with the Royal Flying Corps continues to make most satisfactory progress, and has been most highly creditable to all concerned.

The new weapons that have been placed in the field during the period under review have more than fulfilled expectations, and the enemy must be well aware of their accuracy and general efficiency.

23. I have on previous occasions called your Lordship's attention to the admirable work of the Corps of the Royal Engineers.

This work covers a very wide field, demanding a high standard of technical knowledge and skill, as well as unflagging energy; and throughout the supreme test of war these qualities have never been found wanting, thus reflecting the greatest credit on the organisation of the Corps as a whole, and on the training of the officers and men individually.

The spirit which is imbued in all ranks from the base ports to the front trenches and beyond is the same.

No matter where or how the personnel of the Corps has been employed, devotion to duty and energy have been ever present.

In this despatch I wish particularly to draw attention to the work of the Field Units and Army Troops Companies, which must almost invariably be performed under the most trying circumstances by night as well as by day. Demanding qualities of whole-hearted courage and self-sacrifice, combined with sound judgment and instant action, the work of officers, non-commissioned officers and men has been beyond all praise.

The necessity for skilled labour at the front has been so continuous that Royal Engineer units have frequently been forced to forego those periods of rest which at times it has been possible to grant to other troops; but, in spite of this, they have responded loyally to every call on their services.

Notwithstanding the heavy casualties sustained by all ranks, the esprit de corps of the Royal Engineers is such that the new material is at once animated by the same ideals, and the same devotion to duty is maintained.

24. I desire to call your Lordship's attention to the splendid work carried out by the Tunneling Companies. These companies, officered largely by mining engineers, and manned by professional miners, have devoted themselves whole-heartedly to the dangerous work of offensive and defensive mining, a task ever accompanied by great and unseen dangers.

It is impossible within the limits of a despatch to give any just idea of the work of these units, but it will be found, when their history comes to be written, that it will present a story of danger, of heroism, and of difficulties surmounted worthy of the best traditions of the Royal Engineers, under whose general direction their work is carried out.

25. Owing to the repeated use by the enemy of asphyxiating gases in their attacks on our positions, I have been compelled to resort to similar methods; and a detachment was organised for this purpose, which took part in the operations commencing on the 25th September for the first time.

Although the enemy was known to have been prepared for such reprisals, our gas attack met with marked success, and produced a demoralising effect in some of the opposing units, of which ample evidence was forthcoming in the captured trenches.

The men who undertook this work carried out their unfamiliar duties during a heavy bombardment with conspicuous gallantry and coolness; and I feel confident in their ability to more than hold their own should the enemy again resort to this method of warfare.

26. I would again call your Lordship's attention to the work of the Royal Flying Corps.

Throughout the summer, notwithstanding much unfavourable weather, the work of co-operating with the Artillery, photographing the positions of the enemy, bombing their communications and reconnoitring far over hostile territory has gone on unceasingly.

The volume of work performed steadily increases; the amount of flying has been more than doubled during this period. There have been more than 240 combats in the air, and in nearly every case our pilots have had to seek the enemy behind his own lines, where he is assisted by the fire of his movable anti-aircraft guns; and in spite of this they have succeeded in bringing down four of the German machines behind our trenches and at least twelve in the enemy's lines, and many more have been seen to dive to earth in a damaged condition or to have retired from the fight. On one occasion an officer of the Royal Flying Corps engaged four enemy machines and drove them off, proceeding on his reconnaissance. On another occasion two officers engaged six hostile machines and disabled at least one of them.

Artillery observation and photography are two of the most trying tasks the Royal Flying

Corps is called upon to perform, as our airmen must remain for long periods within easy range of the enemy's anti-aircraft guns.

The work of observation for the guns from aeroplanes has now become an important factor in artillery fire, and the personnel of the two arms work in the closest co-operation.

As evidence of the dangers our flying officers are called upon to face I may state that on one occasion a machine was hit in no fewer than 300 places soon after crossing the enemy's lines, and yet the officer successfully carried out his mission.

The Royal Flying Corps has on several occasions carried out a continuous bombing of the enemy's communications, descending to 500 feet and under in order to hit moving trains on the railway. This has in some cases been kept up day after day; and, during the operations at the end of September, in the space of five days nearly six tons of explosives were dropped on moving trains, and are known to have practically wrecked five, some containing troops, and to have damaged the main railway line in many different places.

For the valuable work carried out by the Royal Flying Corps I am greatly indebted to their commander, Brigadier-General H. M. Trenchard, C.B., D.S.O., A.D.C.

27. Throughout the campaign the financial requirements of the Army have been successfully met by the Army Pay Department. The troops have been paid, and all claims against the Army discharged, with unbroken regularity, and the difficulties inseparable from a foreign banking system and a strange currency have been overcome.

The work of the department has been greatly assisted by the Bank of France, the administration of which has spared no effort to help.

28. While the circumstances of this campaign have brought no exceptional strain on horses, great credit is due to all concerned for the excellent arrangements in the Remount Depôts and Veterinary Hospitals.

29. I am pleased to be able once more to report very favourably on the divisions of the New Armies which have arrived in this country since the date of my last report.

It is evident that great trouble and much hard work have been expended on these units during their training at home, and it is found that they have received such sound teaching that a short period of instruction in trench life under fire soon enables them to take their places with credit beside their acclimatised comrades of the older formations.

30. The Territorial Force units have continued to merit the favourable remarks I have made on them in previous despatches, and have taken a prominent part in many of the active operations in which the Army has been engaged.

31. A new Division has been sent from Canada and has joined the Army in the field. The material of which it is composed is excellent; and this Division will, I am convinced, acquit itself as well in face of the enemy as the 1st Canadian Division has always done.

32. During the period under report I have been very glad once more to receive the Prime Minister at my Headquarters, as well as the Secretary of State for War.

The Prime Minister of Canada and the Minister of Militia and Defence of Canada also

came to France for a few days and visited the troops of the Canadian Contingent.

The Chief Rabbi paid a short visit to the front and interested himself in the members of the large Jewish community now serving with the Army in the Field.

33. I cannot conclude the account of these operations without expressing the deep admiration felt by all ranks of the Army under my command for the splendid part taken by our French Allies in the battle which opened on 25th September. Fortified positions of immense strength, upon which months of skill and labour had been expended, and which extended for many miles, were stormed and captured by our French comrades with a bravery and determination which went far to instil hope and spirit into the Allied Forces.

The large captures of men and material which fell into their hands testified to the completeness of their victory.

The close co-operation between the two Armies of the Allied Powers, which has been so marked a feature throughout the whole campaign, has been as prominent as ever in the work of the last three weeks.

I have already referred to the cordial and willing help rendered by General Foch in the support of the 9th French Corps, and I have also once again to express my deep indebtedness to General d'Urbal, commanding the 10th French Army, operating on my right; and to General Hely d'Oissel, commanding the French Forces in the North.

34. The part taken by the troops of His Majesty the King of the Belgians was very effective in holding the enemy in front of them to his positions.

35. I have many names to bring to your Lordship's notice for valuable, gallant and distinguished service during the period under review, and these will form the subject of a separate report at an early date.

I have the honour to be,

Your Lordship's most obedient Servant,

J. D. P. FRENCH,

Field-Marshal, Commanding-in-Chief,

The British Army in France.