

been broken through to a depth of some four and a half miles on a wide front, and over 5,000 prisoners had already been brought in. But for the wrecking of the bridge at Masnieres and the check at Flesquieres still greater results might have been attained.

Throughout these operations the value of the services rendered by the tanks was very great, and the utmost gallantry, enterprise and resolution were displayed by both officers and crews. In combination with the other arms they helped to make possible a remarkable success. Without their aid in opening a way through the German wire success could only have been attained by methods which would have given the enemy ample warning of our attack, and have allowed him time to mass troops to oppose it. As has been pointed out above, to enable me to undertake such an operation with the troops at my disposal secrecy to the last moment was essential. The tanks alone made it possible to dispense with artillery preparation, and so to conceal our intentions from the enemy up to the actual moment of attack.

Great credit is due also to the Royal Flying Corps for very gallant and most valuable work carried out under conditions of the greatest difficulty from low clouds and driving mist.

In the subsidiary attack at Bullecourt battalions of the 3rd Division and the 16th (Irish) Division successfully completed the work begun by our operations in this area in May and June, 1917, capturing the remainder of the Hindenburg support trench on their front, with some 700 prisoners. A number of counter-attacks against our new positions at Bullecourt on this and the following day were repulsed, with great loss to the enemy.

#### THE ADVANCE CONTINUED.

(4) On the morning of the 21st November the attack on Flesquieres was resumed, and by 8.0 a.m. the village had been turned from the north-west and captured. The obstacle which more than anything else had limited the results of the 20th November was thereby removed, and later in the morning the advance once more became general.

Masnieres had been cleared of the enemy during the previous evening, and at 11.0 a.m. our troops attacked the Beaufort-Masnieres line and established themselves in the portion to the east and north of Masnieres. Heavy fighting took place, and a counter-attack from the direction of Rumilly was beaten off. At the same hour we attacked and captured Les Rues des Vignes, but later in the morning the enemy counter-attacked and compelled our troops to fall back from this position. Progress was also made towards Crevecoeur; but though the canal was crossed during the afternoon, it was found impossible to force the passage of the river in face of the enemy's machine-gun fire.

That evening orders were issued by the Third Army to secure the ground already gained in this area of the battle, and to capture Rumilly on the morrow; but in consequence of the exhaustion of the troops engaged it was found necessary later in the night to cancel the orders for this attack.

West of the Canal de l'Escaut infantry of the 29th Division and dismounted regiments of the 1st and 5th Cavalry Divisions, including the Ambala Brigade, were heavily engaged throughout the day in Noyelles, and beat off all attacks in continuous fighting.

Following upon the capture of Flesquieres, the 51st and 62nd Divisions, in co-operation with a number of tanks and squadrons of the 1st Cavalry Division, attacked at 10.30 a.m. in the direction of Fontaine-notre-Dame and Bourlon.

In this attack the capture of Anneux was completed, and early in the afternoon Cantaing was seized, with some hundreds of prisoners. Progress was made on the outskirts of Bourlon Wood, and late in the afternoon Fontaine-notre-Dame was taken by troops of the 51st Division and tanks. The attack on Bourlon Wood itself was checked by machine-gun fire, though tanks advanced some distance into the wood.

Farther west, the 36th Division advanced north of the Bapaume-Cambrai road, and reached the southern outskirts of Moeuvres, where strong opposition was encountered.

#### THE POSITION ON THE 21ST NOVEMBER.

(5) On the evening of the second day of the attack, therefore, our troops held a line which ran approximately as follows:—

From our old front line east of Gonnellieu the right flank of our new positions lay along the eastern slopes of the Bonavis Ridge, passing east of Lateau Wood and striking the Masnieres-Beaufort line north of the Canal de l'Escaut at a point about half way between Crevecoeur and Masnieres. From this point our line ran roughly north-west, past and including Masnieres, Noyelles and Cantaing, to Fontaine, also inclusive. Thence it bent back to the south for a short distance, making a sharp salient round the latter village, and ran in a general westerly direction along the southern edge of Bourlon Wood and across the southern face of the spur to the west of the wood, to the Canal du Nord, south-east of the village of Moeuvres. From Moeuvres the line linked up once more with our old front at a point about midway between Bourcies and Pronville.

The forty-eight hours after which it had been calculated that the enemy's reserves would begin to arrive had in effect expired, and the high ground at Bourlon village and wood, as well as certain important tactical features to the east and west of the wood, still remained in the enemy's possession. It now became necessary to decide whether to continue the operation offensively or to take up a defensive attitude and rest content with what had been attained.

#### THE DECISION TO GO ON.

(6) It was not possible, however, to let matters stand as they were. The positions captured by us north of Flesquieres were completely commanded by the Bourlon Ridge, and unless this ridge were gained it would be impossible to hold them, except at excessive cost. If I decided not to go on a withdrawal to the Flesquieres Ridge would be necessary, and would have to be carried out at once.

On the other hand, the enemy showed certain signs of an intention to withdraw. Craters had been formed at road junctions, and troops could be seen ready to move east. The possession of Bourlon Ridge would enable our troops to obtain observation over the ground to the north, which sloped gently down to the Sensee River. The enemy's defensive lines south of the Scarpe and Sensee Rivers would thereby be turned, his communications exposed to the