

British forces during the winter months as were essential to keep us informed regarding the dispositions and intentions of the German forces opposed to us. Special attention was directed to disposing our forces in line in such manner as would best promote economy in men and reduce casualties.

On the enemy's side, some little activity continued until the end of the year, and local attacks were made by him both on the Cambrai front and in the Ypres sector; resulting in certain small modifications in the line held by us. In these engagements, the policy followed by me was to avoid involving troops in struggles for non-essential positions, and subordinate commanders were instructed accordingly.

The first of the enemy's minor attacks took place on the 12th December in the neighbourhood of Bullecourt, and after sharp fighting led to the loss of point of the salient held by us East of that village, with a consequent shortening of our line. Other local attacks on the 14th and 22nd December at Polderhoek Château and astride the Ypres-Staden Railway also resulted in small and unimportant withdrawals of portions of our outpost line in these localities.

On the 30th December a somewhat more serious attempt was made by the enemy against our positions on Welsh Ridge, on the Cambrai front. The attack, made in the early morning on a front of over two miles from La Vacquerie northwards towards Marcoing, was delivered in considerable strength and elaborate precautions were taken by the enemy to effect surprise. South of Marcoing, the enemy gained possession of a somewhat isolated trench sited on the northern slopes of Welsh Ridge, compelling our troops to fall back to a sunken road lying across the base of the salient, where they organised a successful resistance. At the southern end of the ridge near La Vacquerie the enemy's attack succeeded in overrunning not only our forward posts but also the trench line on the crest of the ridge, with all its advantages of observation. During the afternoon, however, an admirably executed counter-attack by two companies of the 63rd Division drove the enemy from the crest of the ridge and regained all the essential parts of our former positions.

On the 5th, and again on the 8th January, the enemy made two other local attacks east of Bullecourt, both of which were unsuccessful.

Early in March there was a recrudescence of hostile activity in the northern sector. Following upon an unsuccessful attack on the Belgian advanced positions north of Dixmude on the 6th March, two local attacks were made by the enemy two days later on the British front, the one south and north of the Menin Road, and the other on a front of over a mile south of Houthulst Forest. Both these attacks were repulsed after sharp fighting and our line maintained or re-established by counter-attacks.

During the whole of this period hostile raiding parties displayed greatly increased activity, but the vigilance of our troops prevented them from achieving any success in more than a small proportion of instances. On our side, during the earlier part of the winter, raiding activity was deliberately cut down to the lowest limits consonant with the maintenance of an adequate knowledge of the enemy's dispositions. In the three and a half months extending from the morning of the 8th December, 1917, to the opening of the German offensive, some 225 raids were attempted by the enemy. Not more

than 62 of these were successful in obtaining any identification from our lines, while in 67 cases his raiding parties left prisoners or dead in our hands. During the same period some 125 raids were carried out by us, 77 of which were successful in obtaining prisoners or identifications; while in 31 other cases the enemy's trenches were found to have been evacuated.

Besides raids, considerable patrolling activity took place on both sides. In this form of warfare our troops maintained a marked superiority over the enemy on almost all occasions and secured many prisoners, in addition to inflicting frequent casualties on hostile patrols and working parties.

Indications of the Coming Attack.

(8) Towards the middle of February, 1918, it became evident that the enemy was preparing for a big offensive on the Western front. It was known from various sources that he had been steadily increasing his forces in the Western theatre since the beginning of November, 1917. In three and a half months 28 infantry divisions had been transferred from the Eastern theatre and 6 infantry divisions from the Italian theatre. There were reports that further reinforcements were on their way to the West, and it was also known that the enemy had greatly increased his heavy artillery in the Western theatre during the same period. These reinforcements were more than were necessary for defence, and, as they were moved at a time when the distribution of food and fuel to the civil population in Germany was rendered extremely difficult through lack of rolling stock, I concluded that the enemy intended to attack at an early date.

Constant air reconnaissances over the enemy's lines showed that rail and road communications were being improved and ammunition and supply dumps increased along the whole front from Flanders to the Oise. By the end of February, 1918, these preparations had become very marked opposite the front held by the Third and Fifth British Armies, and I considered it probable that the enemy would make his initial effort from the Sensee River southwards. As the 21st March approached it became certain that an attack on this sector was imminent, and counter-preparation was carried out nightly by our artillery on the threatened front. By the 21st March the number of German infantry divisions in the Western theatre had risen to 192, an increase of 46 since the 1st November, 1917.

British Dispositions to Meet the Enemy's Offensive.

(9) In making the necessary distribution of the forces under my command to meet the threatened German attack, the enemy's possible objectives and the relative importance of ground in the various sectors had to be taken into consideration. These objectives and their bearing on the distribution of the troops are set forth below:—

(i) In the northern portion of the British area lie the northern Channel ports of Dunkirk, Calais and Boulogne, the security of which necessitated the maintenance of sufficient troops in the neighbourhood. Little or no ground could be given up on this front, and therefore the necessary reserves must be kept in close proximity.

Although, as a rule, the state of the ground would preclude a general offensive in