

the enemy gained a footing on the eastern end of the high ground and, though driven back by a counter-attack, re-established his position there and worked west along the ridge. By 7.0 p.m. the whole of it was in his possession, and the retention of Bailleul itself became very difficult. Two hours later, hostile infantry forced their way into the town, and our troops, who were being heavily attacked from the east and south, were compelled to fall back to positions between Meteren and Dranoutre.

The Withdrawal at Passchendaele.

(62) In order to set free additional British troops for the battle and to delay the execution of any plans which the enemy might be entertaining for extending the flank of his attack to the north, I approved of putting into execution the scheme for the gradual evacuation of the Ypres salient. The first stage in this withdrawal had been carried out on the night of the 12th-13th April, since which date our positions on the Passchendaele Ridge had been held by outposts only.

On the night of the 15th-16th April the withdrawal was carried a stage further, our troops taking up positions along the line of the Steenbeek River and the Westhoek and Wytschaete Ridges.

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The Arrival of French Troops.

(63) The constant and severe fighting on the Lys battle front, following so closely upon the tremendous struggle south of Arras, had placed a very serious strain upon the British forces. Many British divisions had taken part both in the northern and southern battles, while others had been engaged almost continuously from the outset of the German offensive. I had represented the state of affairs to General Foch, Commanding-in-Chief the Allied Forces, and had pointed out to him the necessity of relief for the British troops and their need of an opportunity to rest and refit. General Foch had complied with my request without delay. Certain French forces were moved to the north, and by this date were already in position close behind the British front in Flanders.

The First Attacks on Kemmel.

(64) At different times on the 16th April a number of strong local attacks were made by the enemy on the Meteren-Wytschaete front, which were for the most part repulsed with heavy loss to him by the 25th, 34th and 49th Divisions. At Meteren and Wytschaete, however, he succeeded in penetrating our positions, and after much rather confused fighting established himself in both villages. Counter-attacks delivered during the evening by British and French troops failed to eject him, though at Wytschaete a battalion of the 9th Division reached the eastern edge of the village and our line was ultimately established close up to its western and northern outskirts.

These attacks were followed on the morning of the 17th April by a determined attempt on the part of the enemy to capture the commanding feature known as Kemmel Hill. The assault was launched after a preliminary bombardment of great intensity, and was accompanied by strong attacks in the Meteren and Merris sectors.

The enemy's attacks in the Kemmel sector were pressed with great determination, but ended in his complete repulse at all points by troops of the 34th, 49th and 19th Divisions, his

infantry being driven out by counter-attacks wherever they had gained a temporary footing in our line. The attacks at Meteren and Merris were also beaten off with heavy loss by the 33rd Division and the 1st Australian Division.

On this day also the enemy launched a strong assault upon the right of the Belgian Army about the Ypres-Staden Railway. This attack, the object of which was to capture Bixschoote and advance beyond the Yser Canal, ended in complete failure, and left over 700 prisoners in the hands of our Allies.

Operations North of Béthune.

(65) On the 18th April the enemy made a fresh effort to overcome our resistance on the southern flank of his attack. After a heavy bombardment which at Givenchy is reported to have exceeded in intensity even the bombardment of 9th April, his infantry attacked on nearly the whole front from Givenchy to West of Merville. At Givenchy and Festubert they succeeded at certain points in entering our positions, but after severe and continuous fighting, lasting throughout the day, the troops of the 1st Division, under command of Major-General E. P. Strickland, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., regained by counter-attacks practically the whole of their original positions. Elsewhere the enemy failed to obtain even an initial success, being repulsed with exceedingly heavy loss at all points by the 4th and 61st Divisions.

For nearly a week following the failure of these attacks the battle on the Lys front died down, though sharp fighting of a minor character took place from time to time at different points, particularly in the neighbourhood of Festubert, where a strong point, known as Route "A" keep, changed hands more than once before remaining finally in our possession. Further West, the 4th Division, in co-operation with the 61st Division, carried out a series of successful local operations North of the La Bassée Canal, resulting in the capture of some hundreds of prisoners and a considerable improvement of our positions between the Lawe and the Clarence Rivers.

During this period, also, the French troops which had already come into line in the neighbourhood of Meteren and opposite Spanbroekmolen, gradually relieved the British troops between these two points, and by the morning of the 21st April had taken over the whole of the Kemmel sector.

The Attack on Villers Bretonneux.

(66) Local attacks, meanwhile, had taken place from time to time on both sides of the Somme battle front, particularly in the vicinity of Hangard, where our line linked up with the French, and about Aveluy Wood. On the 23rd April a more serious attack, in which four German divisions were employed against the British forces alone and German and British tanks came into conflict for the first time, took place on the Allied front between the Somme and the Avre Valleys.

At about 6.30 a.m., after a heavy bombardment lasting about three hours, the enemy advanced to the assault on the whole British front South of the Somme, under cover of fog. In the ensuing struggle, German tanks broke through our line south-east of Villers Bretonneux, and turning to North and South, opened the way for their infantry. After heavy fight-