

On the 12th September the IV and VI Corps of the Third Army attacked on a front of about five miles in the Havrincourt sector, employing troops of the New Zealand, 37th, 62nd and 2nd Divisions. The villages of Trescault and Havrincourt were taken by the 37th and 62nd Divisions respectively, and positions were secured which were of considerable importance in view of future operations.

On the right of the British front the IX and Australian Corps continued to push forward with light forces. By the evening of the 17th September, as the result of skilful manoeuvring and well-executed local attacks, they had captured Holnon village and wood and Maissemy, and were closely approaching Le Verguier and Templeux-le-Guerard.

Next day, at 7 a.m., on the 18th September, the Fourth and Third Armies attacked in heavy rain on a front of about seventeen miles from Holnon to Gouzeaucourt, the First French Army co-operating south of Holnon. A small number of Tanks accompanied our infantry, and were of great assistance.

In this operation, our troops penetrated to a depth of three miles through the deep, continuous and well-organised defensive belt formed by the old British and German lines. On practically the whole front our objectives were gained successfully, the 1st, 17th, 21st and 74th Divisions (Major-General E. S. Girdwood commanding the 74th Division), and the 1st and 4th Australian Divisions (the latter commanded by Major-General E. Sinclair-Maclagan) distinguishing themselves by the vigour and success of their attack. On the extreme right and in the left centre about Epehy the enemy's resistance was very determined, and in these sectors troops of the 6th, 12th, 18th and 58th Divisions had severe fighting. Before nightfall, however, the last centres of resistance in Epehy were reduced, and both in this area and on our right about Gricourt local actions during the succeeding days secured for us the remainder of the positions required for an attack on the main Hindenburg defences.

At the close of these operations, in which fifteen British Divisions defeated twenty German Divisions and completed the fourth stage of our offensive, we had captured nearly 12,000 prisoners and 100 guns.

### (31) *The Development of the Allied Plan.*

The details of the strategic plan outlined in paragraph 13 upon which future operations should be based were the subject of careful discussion between Marshal Foch and myself. Preparations were already far advanced for the successful attack by which, on the 12th September, the First American Army, assisted by certain French divisions, drove the enemy from the St. Mihiel salient and inflicted heavy losses upon him in prisoners and guns. Ultimately, it was decided that as soon as possible after this attack four convergent and simultaneous offensives should be launched by the Allies as follows:—

By the Americans West of the Meuse in the direction of Mezieres;

By the French West of Argonne in close co-operation with the American attack and with the same general objectives;

By the British on the St. Quentin-Cambrai front in the general direction of Maubeuge;

By Belgian and Allied forces in Flanders in the direction of Ghent.

By these attacks, it was expected, as already indicated, that the important German forces

opposite the French and Americans would be pressed back upon the difficult country of the Ardennes, while the British thrust struck at their principal lines of communication. In Flanders, it was intended to take advantage of the weakening of the German forces on this front to clear the Belgian coast by a surprise attack. Success in any one of these offensives might compel the enemy to withdraw to the line of the Meuse.

### (32) *The Role of the British Armies.*

The results to be obtained from these different attacks depended in a peculiarly large degree upon the British attack in the centre. It was here that the enemy's defences were most highly organised. If these were broken, the threat directed at his vital systems of lateral communication would of necessity react upon his defence elsewhere.

On the other hand, the long period of sustained offensive action through which the British Armies had already passed had made large demands both upon the troops themselves and upon my available reserves. Throughout our attacks from the 8th August onwards, our losses in proportion to the results achieved and the numbers of prisoners taken had been consistently and remarkably small. In the aggregate, however, they were considerable, and in the face of them an attack upon so formidably organised a position as that which now confronted us could not be lightly undertaken. Moreover, the political effects of an unsuccessful attack upon a position so well known as the Hindenburg line would be large, and would go far to revive the declining moral not only of the German Army but of the German people.

These different considerations were present to my mind. The probable results of a costly failure, or, indeed, of anything short of a decided success, in any attempt upon the main defences of the Hindenburg line were obvious; but I was convinced that the British attack was the essential part of the general scheme, and that the moment was favourable.

Accordingly, I decided to proceed with the attack, and all preparatory measures, including the preliminary operations already recounted, were carried out as rapidly and as thoroughly as possible.

### (33) *The Hindenburg Line.*

Between St. Quentin and the village of Bantouzelle the principal defences of the Hindenburg system lie sometimes to the west, but more generally to the east of the line of the Scheldt Canal.

The canal itself does not appear to have been organised as the enemy's main line of resistance, but rather as an integral part of a deep defensive system, the outstanding characteristic of which was the skill with which it was sited so as to deny us effective artillery positions from which to attack it. The chief rôle of the canal was that of affording cover to resting troops and to the garrisons of the main defensive trench lines during a bombardment. To this end the canal lent itself admirably, and the fullest use was made by the enemy of its possibilities.

The general configuration of the ground through which this sector of the canal runs produces deep cuttings of a depth in places of some sixty feet, while between Bellicourt and the neighbourhood of Venduille the canal passes through a tunnel for a distance of 6,000