

Fourth Army to the area west of the frontier and about Namur.

The Advance into Germany.

(6) On the morning of the 1st December, a date for ever memorable as witnessing the consummation of the hopes and efforts of 4½ years of heroic fighting, the 1st Cavalry Division crossed the frontier between Belgium and Germany. On the same day the 2nd and 1st Canadian Divisions of the Canadian Corps and the 29th and 9th Divisions of the II Corps resumed their march towards the frontier.

On this date, however, the supply situation became critical, trains due on the 30th November failing to arrive until the night of the 1st/2nd December. In consequence for two days the Army remained practically stationary, and it was not until the 4th December that progress was resumed.

In this stage of our march the line of our advance traversed the northern portion of the Ardennes, and, particularly on the right in the Canadian Corps area, the country through which our troops were passing was of a most difficult character. Practicable roads were few, villages were far apart, and facilities for billeting very limited. Our way lay across a country of great hills rising to over 2,000 feet, covered by wide stretches of forest, and cut by deep and narrow valleys, along the steep sides of which the roads wound in countless sudden curves. Marches were long, while the surface of the roads which had already borne the traffic of the retreating German Armies suffered anew under the passage of our columns. Even under conditions approximating to those of peace, severe demands were made upon the spirit and endurance of the troops.

British Troops in Cologne.

(7) On the 6th December, in response to a request previously made by the German authorities, and in order that the town might not be left without troops after the withdrawal of the enemy's military forces, the 2nd Brigade of the 1st Cavalry Division was sent forward to Cologne. A detachment of armoured cars of the 17th (A.C.) Battalion, Tank Corps, escorted the General Officer Commanding 1st Cavalry Division into Cologne, and thereafter picketed the bridges, being the first British troops to cross the Rhine. A great concourse of people thronged the streets of the city to watch the arrival of our troops. Next day, the 28th Infantry Brigade of the 9th Division arrived at Cologne by rail, and on the 8th December the 1st Cavalry Division reached the Rhine on the whole British front, securing the crossings of the river.

While during the following days our infantry continued their movement, on the 11th December the Military Governor, Lieut.-General Sir Charles Fergusson, arrived by train at Cologne. Accompanied by an escort of the 9th Lancers, he proceeded through crowded streets to the Hotel Monopol, where he took up the duties of his office. As the Military Governor reached the entrance to the hotel, the Union Jack was hoisted above the building and floated out for the first time over the roof-tops of the city.

The Occupation of the Cologne Bridgehead.

(8) On the 12th December, the day fixed for that event by the general scheme of advance, the 1st Cavalry Division crossed the Rhine and commenced the occupation of the Cologne

Bridgehead, the perimeter of which they reached on the following day.

On the 13th December the 2nd and 1st Canadian Divisions and the 29th and 9th Divisions of the Canadian and II Corps passed across the Rhine at Cologne and Bonn respectively in four columns, each of the strength of a division. During the following three days they pushed forward to the bridgehead perimeter, gradually relieving the cavalry, and by the evening of the 16th December had completed the occupation of the bridgehead.

Before Christmas Day the troops of the Second Army had reached their final areas in the occupied territories of Germany. The military organisation of the bridgehead, so as to secure the crossing of the Rhine and render possible the rapid deployment of troops for action east of it, had been commenced, and was proceeded with steadily during the remainder of the year. In the course of this work, on the 28th December the perimeter of the bridgehead was slightly amended (vide attached map),* so as to accord with the boundaries of the German Communal Districts and thus simplify the work of administration.

Conduct of the Troops.

(9) In concluding this part of my Despatch, I desire to acknowledge with gratitude and pride the exemplary conduct of the troops, both throughout the different stages of their arduous advance and since its successful completion.

Among all services and in all Armies, both those which took part in the advance and those which remained behind, the period following the armistice has indeed been one of no little difficulty. For those that went forward, the real hardships of the long marches, poor billets, and indifferent food constituted a strange contrast to ideas which had been formed of victory. For all, the sudden relaxation of the enduring tension of battle, and the natural desire of the great majority for an early return to civil life, could not but lead at times to a certain impatience with delays, and with the continuance, under conditions of apparent peace, of restrictions and routine duties gladly borne while the future of their country was at stake. Despite these disturbing factors, and the novelty of finding themselves masters in a conquered country, instances of misbehaviour have been remarkably few, and chiefly of a minor character. The inborn courtesy and good temper of the British soldier have guided them in their attitude towards the inhabitants of the occupied districts. The spreading of a better understanding of the causes of the temporary shortage of supplies, of the difficulties of demobilisation and of the continued necessity for keeping a strong Army in the field, has generally dispelled any incipient feelings of discontent.

The discipline, self-respect and strong sense of responsibility which carried our men through to victory, have in general been fully maintained amid changed conditions and new surroundings.

PART II.

FEATURES OF THE WAR.

A Single Great Battle.

(10) In this, my final Despatch, I think it desirable to comment briefly upon certain

* Not reproduced.