

THE STANDARD HISTORY
OF THE WAR
VOL. I

BY
EDGAR WALLACE

The Standard History of the War

INTRODUCTION

BEFORE THE BRITISH CAME

IT is unnecessary within the scope of this volume to do more than sketch the events which led to a condition of war between Great Britain, France, Russia, Belgium and Servia on the one part, and Germany and Austria-Hungary on the other.

The assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his consort at Sarajevo, on July 25, was the ostensible reason for the presentation of the Austro-Hungarian note to Servia. This made demands upon Servia with which no self-governing state could comply, and was followed by military preparations in the dual kingdom.

Russia, who saw in these demands an oblique challenge to her as guardian of the Slav peoples, at once began to move. But at the earnest request of Sir Edward Grey her military mobilization was delayed whilst efforts were made not only by Great Britain, but by France to induce the Government of Germany to exercise its undoubted influence to avert war between Servia and Austria-Hungary.

Germany tacitly declined to second the efforts of Great Britain, and on July 30 a partial mobilization of the Russian Army was ordered, followed on the next day by a ukase commanding a general mobilization.

Even now Great Britain did not give up hope of averting the calamity of a European war, though Germany had declared herself in a state of war. But on the following day all hope of peace was abandoned. Although the mobilization of the Russian Army was explicitly directed towards Austria-Hungary, who had opened her campaign against Servia by a bombardment of Belgrade, the German Government cast the torch into the world.

On August 1 at 7.30 p.m. (Russian time) Germany declared war upon Russia, and German troops waiting on the frontier, gathered there in readiness, invaded the Neutral State of Luxemburg, and, seizing the railway, established the headquarters of the invading army in the capital. This was immediately followed by an ominous movement on the frontier of Belgium, the neutrality of which country was guaranteed by the Powers, including Great Britain, France and Germany.

Great Britain addressed questions couched in identical terms to France and Germany. Would these powers respect the neutrality of Belgium?

The reply of the French Government was prompt, and was in the affirmative. In the war of 1870, France had given a similar undertaking and had most

honourably fulfilled her part, though by so doing she was compelled to fight the disastrous battle of Sedan.

The German reply, however, was evasive. Great Britain repeated her question, and demanded, through her Ambassador, a reply by eleven o'clock that night (German time). This was on August 4, two days after Germany had called upon Belgium to allow the unhampered passage of her troops through that country—a demand which was rejected by the Belgian Government with little hesitation.

On August 4 two German Army Corps, under General von Emmich, were already hammering at the door of Belgium, claiming admission. But the door was a particularly stout one, and Liège, splendidly commanded by General Leman, swept back the first attack without difficulty.

On the 4th of August, whilst the guns thundered about Liège, the order went forth for the mobilization of the British Army, and there followed the quiet, orderly gathering of reservists all over Great Britain.

On the 6th of August two of the Liège forts were silenced. The gallant commander—General Leman—was taken prisoner, having been found in an unconscious state amidst the ruins of one of the forts he had so bravely defended.

So terrible had been the havoc created by the Belgian artillery and infantry fire that the German commander asked for an armistice of twenty-four hours to bury his dead, a request which was refused.

But the German had his foothold, and through the area which had previously been swept by the guns of the two forts which were now destroyed the main body of the covering army passed into the town of Liège, leaving the remainder of the forts intact.

Heavy fighting between the Belgians and the invader now followed. French troops rushed northward, held Dinant and the country about, and there were fierce encounters between the traditional enemies who, further south, were already at grips in Alsace.

Between the German occupation of Liège and the events which are chronicled in this book, much happened. There was prolonged and bitter outpost fighting between the Belgians and their invader, and after a siege of ten days the remaining forts of Liège were reduced by means of very heavy guns. Among them the 42-centimeter howitzer, specially constructed by Krupps, was employed with very deadly effect.

The covering armies under von Emmich had been strongly reinforced, and it was now evident that the main attack upon France was to be expected from this quarter.

It was not until the 16th of August that the first instalment of the Expeditionary Army of Great Britain completed its landing in France. That force was under the command of Field-Marshal Sir John French. It consisted of two Army Corps, the composition of which was not revealed. Sir John French hastened to Paris for a brief consultation with the French War Minister and his colleagues before leaving to make his dispositions for resisting the advance of the enemy from Belgium.

Now threatened by the rapid advance of the main German Army, the Belgian Government transferred its seat from Brussels to Antwerp. On the 20th, the German Army entered Brussels, the civic guard having been disarmed by order of the burghomaster.

Whilst the right wing of the Germans was in possession of the capital, other great armies were moving diagonally toward the French frontier. On the 21st of August the French, who were holding a line of which the Belgian town of Charleroi was either the left or the left centre, came into touch with the enemy, and fierce fighting ensued.

On the next day another German Army attacked Namur, which marked the right of the French position. Namur, which was expected to offer even a more determined resistance than Liège had done, was carried after two days' fighting.

The French were beginning to fall back from Charleroi when, on August 22, the British came to their position at Mons, which lies directly to the left of where the French had been fighting. Only now did it become apparent to the defending line that the attack was being made in overwhelming strength. The battle of Charleroi was ended, our Ally was actually falling back, and Namur had been evacuated when the events which Sir John French describes began.

CHAPTER I. — THE GREAT RETREAT

MONS—CAMBRAI—LE CATEAU

THE FIRST DESPATCH

(From Field-Marshal Sir John French)

RECEIVED by the Secretary of State for War from the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief, British Forces in the Field—

September 7, 1914.

MY LORD,

I have the honour to report the proceedings of the Field Force under my command up to the time of rendering this despatch.

The transport of the troops from England both by sea and by rail was effected in the best order and without a check. Each unit arrived at its destination in this country well within the scheduled time.

The concentration was practically complete on the evening of Friday, the 21st ultimo, and I was able to make dispositions to move the Force during Saturday, the 22nd, to positions I considered most favourable from which to commence operations which the French Commander-in-Chief, General Joffre, requested me to undertake in pursuance of his plans in prosecution of the campaign.

The line taken up extended along the line of the canal from Condé on the west, through Mons and Binche on the east. This line was taken up as follows—

From Condé to Mons inclusive was assigned to the 2nd Corps, and to the right of the 2nd Corps from Mons the 1st Corps was posted. The 5th Cavalry Brigade was placed at Binche.

In the absence of my 3rd Army Corps, I desired to keep the Cavalry Division as much as possible as a reserve to act on my outer flank, or move in support of any threatened part of the line. The forward reconnaissance was entrusted to Brigadier-General Sir Philip Chetwode with the 5th Cavalry Brigade, but I directed General Allenby to send forward a few squadrons to assist in this work.

During August 22nd and 23rd these advanced squadrons did some excellent work, some of them penetrating as far as Soignies, and several encounters took place in which our troops showed to great advantage.

At 6 a.m. on August 23 I assembled the Commanders of the 1st and 2nd Corps and Cavalry Division at a point close to the position, and explained the general situation of the Allies, and what I understood to be General

Joffre's plan. I discussed with them at some length the immediate situation in front of us.

From information I received from French Headquarters I understood that little more than one, or at most two, of the enemy's Army Corps, with perhaps one Cavalry Division, were in front of my position; and I was aware of no attempted outflanking movement by the enemy. I was confirmed in this opinion by the fact that my patrols encountered no undue opposition in their reconnoitring operations. The observation of my aeroplanes seemed also to bear out this estimate.

About 3 p.m. on Sunday, the 23rd, reports began coming in to the effect that the enemy was commencing an attack on the Mons line, apparently in some strength, but that the right of the position from Mons and Bray was being particularly threatened.

The Commander of the 1st Corps had pushed his flank back to some high ground south of Bray, and the 5th Cavalry Brigade evacuated Binche, moving slightly south; the enemy thereupon occupied Binche.

The right of the 3rd Division, under General Hamilton, was at Mons, which formed a somewhat dangerous salient, and I directed the Commander of the 2nd Corps to be careful not to keep the troops on this salient too long, but, if threatened seriously, to draw back the centre behind Mons. This was done before dark. In the meantime, about 5 p.m., I received a most unexpected message from General Joffre by telegraph, telling me that at least three German Corps, viz. a reserve corps, the 4th Corps and the 9th Corps, were moving on my position in front, and that the 2nd Corps was engaged in a turning movement from the direction of Tournay. He also informed me that the two reserve French divisions and the 5th French Army on my right were retiring,† the Germans having on the previous day gained possession of the passages of the Sambre between Charleroi and Namur.

In view of the possibility of my being driven from the Mons position, I had previously ordered a position in the rear to be reconnoitred. This position rested on the fortress of Maubeuge on the right and extended west to Jenlain, south-east of Valenciennes, on the left. The position was reported difficult to hold, because standing crops and buildings made the siting of trenches very difficult and limited the field of fire in many important localities. It nevertheless afforded a few good artillery positions.

When the news of the retirement of the French and the heavy German threatening on my front reached me, I endeavoured to confirm it by aeroplane reconnaissance; and as a result of this I determined to effect a retirement to the Maubeuge position at daybreak on the 24th.

A certain amount of fighting continued along the whole line throughout the night, and at daybreak on the 24th the 2nd Division from the neighbourhood of Harmignies made a powerful demonstration as if to retake Binche. This was supported by the artillery of both the 1st and 2nd Divisions, whilst the 1st Division took up a supporting position in the neighbourhood of Peissant. Under cover of this demonstration the 2nd Corps retired on the line Dour-Quarouble-Frameries. The 3rd Division on the right of the Corps suffered considerable loss in this operation from the enemy, who had retaken Mons.

The 2nd Corps halted on this line, where they partially entrenched themselves, enabling Sir Douglas Haig with the 1st Corps gradually to withdraw to the new position; and he effected this without much further loss, reaching the line Bavai-Maubeuge about 7 p.m. Towards midday the enemy appeared to be directing his principal effort against our left.

I had previously ordered General Allenby with the Cavalry to act vigorously in advance of my left front and endeavour to take the pressure off.

About 7.30 a.m. General Allenby received a message from Sir Francis Fergusson, commanding 5th Division, saying that he was very hard pressed and in urgent need of support. On receipt of this message General Allenby drew in the Cavalry and endeavoured to bring direct support to the 5th Division.

During the course of this operation General De Lisle, of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, thought he saw a good opportunity to paralyse the further advance of the enemy's infantry by making a mounted attack on his flank. He formed up and advanced for this purpose, but was held up by wire about 500 yards from his objective, and the 9th Lancers and 18th Hussars suffered severely in the retirement of the Brigade.

The 19th Infantry Brigade, which had been guarding the Line of Communications, was brought up by rail to Valenciennes on the 22nd and 23rd. On the morning of the 24th they were moved out to a position south of Quarouble to support the left flank of the 2nd Corps.

With the assistance of the Cavalry Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien was enabled to effect his retreat to a new position; although, having two corps of the enemy on his front and one threatening his flank, he suffered great losses in doing so.

At nightfall the position was occupied by the 2nd Corps to the west of Bavai, the 1st Corps to the right. The right was protected by the fortress of Maubeuge, the left by the 19th Brigade in position between Jenlain and Bry, and the Cavalry on the outer flank.

The French were still retiring, and I had no support except such as was afforded by the fortress of Maubeuge; and the determined attempts of the enemy to get round my left flank assured me that it was his intention to hem me against that place and surround me. I felt that not a moment must be lost in retiring to another position.

I had every reason to believe that the enemy's forces were somewhat exhausted, and I knew that they had suffered heavy losses. I hoped therefore that his pursuit would not be too vigorous to prevent me effecting my object.

The operation, however, was full of danger and difficulty, not only owing to the very superior force in my front, but also to the exhaustion of the troops.

The retirement was recommenced in the early morning of August 25 to a position in the neighbourhood of Le Cateau, and rearguards were ordered to be clear of the Maubeuge-Bavai-Eth Road by 5.30 a.m.

Two Cavalry Brigades, with the Divisional Cavalry of the 2nd Corps, covered the movement of the 2nd Corps. The remainder of the Cavalry Division, with the 19th Brigade, the whole under the command of General Allenby, covered the west flank.

The 4th Division commenced its detrainment at Le Cateau on Sunday, the 23rd, and by the morning of the 25th eleven battalions and a Brigade of Artillery with Divisional Staff were available for service.

I ordered General Snow to move out to take up a position with his right south of Solesmes, his left resting on the Cambrai-Le Cateau Road south of La Chaprie. In this position the Division rendered great help to the effective retirement of the 2nd and 1st Corps to the new position.

Although the troops had been ordered to occupy the Cambrai-Le Cateau-Landrecies position, and the ground had, during the 25th, been partially prepared and entrenched, I had grave doubts—owing to the information I received as to the accumulating strength of the enemy against me—as to the wisdom of standing there to fight.

Having regard to the continued retirement of the French on my right, my exposed left flank, the tendency of the enemy's western corps (II) to envelop me, and, more than all, the exhausted condition of the troops, I determined to make a great effort to continue the retreat till I could put some substantial obstacle, such as the Somme or the Oise, between my troops and the enemy, and afford the former some opportunity of rest and reorganization. Orders were, therefore, sent to the Corps Commanders to continue their retreat as soon as they possibly could towards the general line Vermand-St. Quentin-Ribemont.

The Cavalry, under General Allenby, were ordered to cover the retirement.

Throughout the 25th and far into the evening the 1st Corps continued its march on Landrecies, following the road along the eastern border of the Forfit de Mormal, and arrived at Landrecies about ten o'clock. I had intended that the Corps should come further west so as to fill up the gap between Le Cateau and Landrecies, but the men were exhausted and could not get further in without rest.

The enemy, however, would not allow them this rest, and about 9.30 p.m. a report was received that the 4th Guards Brigade in Landrecies was heavily attacked by troops of the 9th German Army Corps who were coming through the forest on the north of the town. This brigade fought most gallantly and caused the enemy to suffer tremendous loss in issuing from the forest into the narrow streets of the town. This loss has been estimated from reliable sources at from 700 to 1000. At the same time information reached me from Sir Douglas Haig that his 1st Division was also heavily engaged south and east of Maroilles. I sent urgent messages to the Commander of the two French Reserve Divisions on my right to come up to the assistance of the 1st Corps, which they eventually did. Partly owing to this assistance, but mainly to the skilful manner in which Sir Douglas Haig extricated his Corps from an exceptionally difficult position in the darkness of the night, they were able at dawn to resume their march south towards Wassigny on Guise.

By about 6 p.m. the 2nd Corps had got into position with their right on Le Cateau, their left in the neighbourhood of Caudry, and the line of defence was continued thence by the 4th Division towards Seranvillers, the left being thrown back.

During the fighting on the 24th and 25th the Cavalry became a good deal scattered, but by the early morning of the 26th General Allenby had succeeded in concentrating two brigades to the south of Cambrai.

The 4th Division was placed under the orders of the General Officer Commanding the 2nd Army Corps.

On the 24th the French Cavalry Corps, consisting of three divisions, under General Sordfit, had been in billets north of Avesnes. On my way back from Bavai, which was my "Poste de Commandement" during the fighting of the 23rd and 24th, I visited General Sordfit, and earnestly requested his co-operation and support. He promised to obtain sanction from his Army Commander to act on my left flank, but said that his horses were too tired to move before the next day. Although he rendered me valuable assistance later on in the course of the retirement, he was unable for the reasons given to afford me any support on the most critical day of all, viz. the 26th.

At daybreak on August 26 it became apparent that the enemy was throwing the bulk of his strength against the left of the position occupied by the 2nd Corps and the 4th Division.

At this time the guns of four German Army Corps were in position against them, and Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien reported to me that he judged it impossible to continue his retirement at daybreak (as ordered) in face of such an attack.

I sent him orders to use his utmost endeavours to break off the action and retire at the earliest possible moment, as it was impossible for me to send him any support, the 1st Corps being at the moment incapable of movement.

The French Cavalry Corps, under General Sordfit, was coming up on our left rear early in the morning, and I sent an urgent message to him to do his utmost to come up and support the retirement of my left flank; but owing to the fatigue of his horses he found himself unable to intervene in any way.

There had been no time to entrench the position properly, but the troops showed a magnificent front to the terrible fire which confronted them.

The Artillery, although outmatched by at least four to one, made a splendid fight, and inflicted heavy losses on their opponents.

At length it became apparent that, if complete annihilation was to be avoided, a retirement must be attempted; and the order was given to commence it about 3.30 p.m. The movement was covered with the most devoted intrepidity and determination by the Artillery, which had itself suffered heavily, and the fine work done by the Cavalry in the further retreat from the position assisted materially in the final completion of this most difficult and dangerous operation.

Fortunately the enemy had himself suffered too heavily to engage in an energetic pursuit.

I cannot close the brief account of this glorious stand of the British troops without putting on record my deep appreciation of the valuable services rendered by General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien.

I say without hesitation that the saving of the left wing of the Army under my command on the morning of the 26th August could never have been accomplished unless a commander of rare and unusual coolness, intrepidity, and determination had been present to personally conduct the operation.

The retreat was continued far into the night of the 26th and through the 27th and 28th, on which date the troops halted on the line Noyon-Chauny-La Fère, having then thrown off the weight of the enemy's pursuit.

On the 27th and 28th I was much indebted to General Sordfit and the French Cavalry Division which he commands for materially assisting my retirement and successfully driving back some of the enemy on Cambrai.

General D'Amade also, with the 61st and 62nd French Reserve Divisions, moved down from the neighbourhood of Arras on the enemy's right flank and took much pressure off the rear of the British Forces.

This closes the period covering the heavy fighting which commenced at Mons on Sunday afternoon, August 23, and which really constituted a four days' battle.

At this point, therefore, I propose to close the present despatch.

I deeply deplore the very serious losses which the British Forces have suffered in this great battle; but they were inevitable in view of the fact that the British Army—only two days after a concentration by rail—was called upon to withstand a vigorous attack of five German Army Corps.

The line of the retreat from Mons is indicated by arrows.

The approximate position of the opposing armies at the most southerly point of the German advance is also shown.

It is impossible for me to speak too highly of the skill evinced by the two General Officers commanding Army Corps; the self-sacrificing and devoted exertions of their Staffs; the direction of the troops by Divisional, Brigade and Regimental Leaders; the command of the smaller units by their officers; and the magnificent fighting spirit displayed by non-commissioned officers and men.

I wish particularly to bring to your Lordship's notice the admirable work done by the Royal Flying Corps under Sir David Henderson. Their skill, energy, and perseverance have been beyond all praise. They have furnished me with the most complete and accurate information which has been of incalculable value in the conduct of the operations. Fired at constantly both by friend and foe, and not hesitating to fly in every kind of weather, they have remained undaunted throughout.

Further, by actually fighting in the air, they have succeeded in destroying five of the enemy's machines.

I wish to acknowledge with deep gratitude the incalculable assistance I received from the General and Personal Staffs at Headquarters during this trying period.

Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Murray, Chief of the General Staff; Major-General Wilson, Sub-Chief of the General Staff;† and all under them have worked day and night unceasingly with the utmost skill, self-sacrifice and

devotion; and the same acknowledgment is due by me to Brigadier-General Hon. W. Lambton, my Military Secretary and the Personal Staff.‡

In such operations as I have described the work of the Quartermaster-General is of an extremely onerous nature. Major-General Sir William Robertson# has met what appeared to be almost insuperable difficulties with his characteristic energy, skill and determination; and it is largely owing to his exertions that the hardships and sufferings of the troops—inseparable from such operations—were not much greater.

I have not yet been able to complete the list of officers whose names I desire to bring to your Lordship's notice for services rendered during the period under review; and, as I understand it is of importance that this despatch should no longer be delayed, I propose to forward this list, separately, as soon as I can.

I have the honour to be,

Your Lordship's most obedient Servant, (Signed) J.D.P. French, Field-Marshal,

Commander-in-Chief, British Forces in the Field.

General Joffre, Commander of the French Army

HOW THE BRITISH FOUGHT

WHILST the British were thus engaged, the French on their right were being driven into French Lorraine, and the German forces left to contain the Belgian Army were carrying out their work of destruction.

On the day that Sir John French was fighting so desperately before Le Cateau-Cambrai, the Germans, on the pretext of punishing the shooting of some of their soldiers by the civilian population, had set to work to destroy Louvain, a Zeppelin had dropped bombs on Antwerp, and the great battle before Lemberg had begun in Galicia. These facts are given that the reader may assemble in their chronological order the events of that fateful week. There can be no doubt but that the position of the British Army was critical. If the arrival of the 4th Division had been delayed for two hours the Army Corps under Smith-Dorrien could hardly have extricated itself without suffering enormous losses, if indeed it could have got away at all. The fighting was of a peculiarly fierce character, but pressed as they were the British were a terribly punishing force. Their fire, well directed, was never wasted. The men nursed their ammunition and "shot for heads." The story is told by one officer that he had all his work cut out to get one section to retire, and there can be no doubt that the losses we sustained in the shape of missing and prisoners taken by the enemy was due largely to the courage of our men, who stuck to their work of beating back the Kaiser's corps.

The German soldiers themselves directed the whole of their resources to outflanking their British opponents.

An Imperial order had gone forth to the German forces directing them

"to devote the whole of your attention to the treacherous English and to walk over General French's contemptible little army."

The task was no light one, in whatever spirit of confidence the German legions came. They sustained enormous losses in the face of the British rifle fire, which has won the admiration of the Allies.

Cool as though on parade or firing at Ash ranges, the infantry were offered excellent practice at between 500 and 600 yards. This is the range at which the British army has invariably shown its highest percentage of hits, and the German losses before Cambrai and Le Cateau must have been very heavy, for the rifle used by our men is the best weapon in the field.

Even in their success the Germans were again and again repulsed.

"They came on in solid formation," writes one officer, "shoulder to shoulder, the most confident body of men that ever marched on to a battle-field. Some of them had unsmoked cigars stuck between the buttons of their tunics ... it looked as if nothing could arrest that heavy mass, but after a sighting shot or two our men got the range and then you saw things happen. In three minutes from being a solid body it became a ragged, straggling line, then it peeled away to nothing. Behind was another double company, and the same thing happened all over again. It was extraordinary to see them skipping and jumping over the bodies of their fallen comrades only to fall themselves and become a further obstacle to the men behind."

This was the British punch, a staggering one, but numbers told in the long run. Swiftly moving columns began to work round the British left, and the order to retire came none too soon. Field-Marshal French was himself under fire most of this day.

[In the internal of the Field-Marshal's personal despatches "Eye-Witness" sent home official reports from time to time.]

IT is now possible to make another general survey of the operations of the British Army during the last week.

No new main trial of strength has taken place. There have indeed been battles in various parts of the immense front which, in other wars, would have been considered operations of the first magnitude; but, in this war, they are merely the incidents of the strategic withdrawal and contraction of the allied forces necessitated by the initial shock on the frontiers and in Belgium, and by the enormous strength which the Germans have thrown

into the western theatre, while suffering heavily through weakness in the eastern.

The British Expeditionary Army has conformed to the general movement of the French forces and acted in harmony with the strategic conceptions of the French General Staff.

Since the battle at Cambrai on August 26, where the British troops successfully guarded the left flank of the whole line of French Armies from a deadly turning attack supported by enormous force, the 7th French Army has come into operation on our left, and this, in conjunction with the 5th Army on our right, has greatly taken the strain and pressure off our men.

The 5th French Army in particular on August 29 advanced from the line of the Oise River to meet and counter the German forward movement, and a considerable battle developed to the south of Guise. In this the 5th French Army gained a marked and solid success, driving back with heavy loss and in disorder three German Army Corps, the 10th, the Guard, and a reserve corps. It is believed that the Commander of the 10th German Corps was among those killed.

In spite of this success, however, and all the benefits which flowed from it, the general retirement to the south continued and the German armies, seeking persistently after the British troops, remained in practically continuous contact with our rearguards.

On August 30 and 31 the British covering and delaying troops were frequently engaged, and on September 1 a very vigorous effort was made by the Germans, which brought about a sharp action in the neighbourhood of Compiègne.

This action was fought principally by the 1st British Cavalry Brigade and the 4th Guards Brigade and was entirely satisfactory to the British.

The German attack, which was most strongly pressed, was not brought to a standstill until much slaughter had been inflicted upon them and until 10 German guns had been captured. The brunt of this creditable affair fell upon our Guards Brigade, who lost in killed and wounded about 300 men.

After this engagement our troops were no longer molested. Wednesday, September 2, was the first quiet day they had had since the battle of Mons on August 23. During the whole of this period marching and fighting had been continuous, and in the whole period the British casualties had amounted, according to the latest estimates, to about 15,000 officers and men.

The fighting, having been in open order upon a wide front with repeated retirements, has led to a large number of officers and men and even small

parties missing their way and getting separated, and it is known that a very considerable number of those now included in the total will rejoin the colours safely.

These losses, though heavy in so small a force, have in no wise affected the spirit of the troops. They do not amount to a third of the losses inflicted by the British force upon the enemy, and the sacrifice required of the Army has not been out of proportion to its military achievements.

In all, drafts amounting to 19,000 men have reached our Army or are approaching them on the line of communication, and advantage is being taken of the five quiet days that have passed since the action of September 1 to fill up the gaps and refit and consolidate the units.

The British Army is now south of the Marne, and is in line with the French forces on the right and left. The latest information about the enemy is that they are neglecting Paris and are marching in a south-easterly direction towards the Marne and towards the left and centre of the French line.

The 1st German Army is reported to be between La Ferté-sous-Jouarre and Essises-Viffort. The 2nd German Army, after taking Reims, has advanced to Chateau-Thierry and to the east of that place. The 4th German Army is reported to be marching south on the west of the Argonne, between Suippes and Ville sur Tourbe. All these points were reached by the Germans on September 3.

The 7th German Army has been repulsed by a French Corps near D'Einville. It would, therefore, appear that the enveloping movement upon the Anglo-French left flank has been abandoned by the Germans, either because it is no longer practicable to continue such a great extension or because the alternative of a direct attack upon the allied line is preferred. Whether this change of plan by the Germans is voluntary or whether it has been enforced upon them by the strategic situation and the great strength of the Allied Armies in their front will be revealed by the course of events.

There is no doubt whatever that our men have established a personal ascendancy over the Germans, and that they are conscious of the fact that with anything like even numbers the result would not be doubtful.

The shooting of the German infantry is poor, while the British rifle fire has devastated every column of attack that has presented itself. Their superior training and intelligence has enabled the British to use open formations with effect, and thus to cope with the vast numbers employed by the enemy. The cavalry, who have had even more opportunities for displaying personal prowess and address, have definitely established their superiority.

Sir John French's reports dwell on this marked superiority of the British troops of every arm of the service over the Germans. "The cavalry," he says,

"do as they like with the enemy until they are confronted by thrice their numbers. The German patrols simply fly before our horsemen. The German troops will not face our infantry fire, and as regards our artillery they have never been opposed by less than three or four times their numbers."

The following incidents have been mentioned—

During the action at Le Cateau on August 26 the whole of the officers and men of one of the British batteries had been killed or wounded with the exception of one subaltern and two gunners. These continued to serve one gun, kept up a sound rate of fire, and came unhurt from the battlefield.

On another occasion a portion of a supply column was cut off by a detachment of German cavalry and the officer in charge was summoned to surrender. He refused, and starting his motors off at full speed dashed safely through, losing only two lorries.

It is noted that during the rearguard action of the Guards Brigade on September 1 the Germans were seen giving assistance to our wounded.

The weather has been very hot with an almost tropical sun, which has made the long marches trying to the soldiers. In spite of this they look well and hearty, and the horses, in consequence of the amount of hay and oats in the fields, are in excellent condition.

In short it may be said that the war so far as it has advanced has given most promising opportunities of adding to the reputation of the British arms and of achieving notable and substantial successes; but we must have more men so as to operate on a scale proportionate to the strength and power of the Empire.

CHAPTER II. — THE GREAT "RETURN"

PARIS—THE MARNE—THE AISNE

THE SECOND DESPATCH

September 17, 1914.

MY LORD,

In continuation of my despatch of September 7, I have the honour to report the further progress of the operations of the forces under my command from August 28.

On that evening the retirement of the force was followed closely by two of the enemy's cavalry columns, moving south-east from St. Quentin.

The retreat in this part of the field was being covered by the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades. South of the Somme General Gough, with the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, threw back the Uhlans of the Guard with considerable loss.

General Chetwode, with the 5th Cavalry Brigade, encountered the eastern column near Cerizy, moving south. The Brigade attacked and routed the column, the leading German regiment suffering very severe casualties and being almost broken up.

The 7th French Army Corps was now in course of being railed up from the south to the east of Amiens. On the 29th it nearly completed its detrainment, and the French 6th Army got into position on my left, its right resting on Roye.

The 5th French Army was behind the line of the Oise between La Fère and Guise.

The pursuit of the enemy was very vigorous; some five or six German corps were on the Somme, facing the 5th Army on the Oise. At least two corps were advancing towards my front, and were crossing the Somme east and west of Ham. Three or four more German corps were opposing the 6th French Army on my left.

This was the situation at one o'clock on the 29th, when I received a visit from General Joffre at my headquarters.

I strongly represented my position to the French Commander-in-Chief, who was most kind, cordial, and sympathetic, as he has always been. He told me that he had directed the 5th French Army on the Oise to move forward and attack the Germans on the Somme, with a view to checking pursuit. He also told me of the formation of the 6th French Army on my left flank, composed of the 7th Army Corps, four reserve divisions, and Sordfit's corps of cavalry.

I finally arranged with General Joffre to effect a further short retirement towards the line Compiègne-Soissons, promising him, however, to do my utmost to keep always within a day's march of him.

In pursuance of this arrangement the British forces retired to a position a few miles north of the line Compiègne-Soissons on the 29th.

The right flank of the German Army was now reaching a point which appeared seriously to endanger my line of communications with Havre. I had already evacuated Amiens, into which place a German reserve division was reported to have moved.

Orders were given to change the base to St. Nazaire, and establish an advance base at Le Mans. This operation was well carried out by the Inspector-General of Communications.

In spite of a severe defeat inflicted upon the Guard 10th and Guard Reserve Corps of the German Army by the 1st and 3rd French Corps on the right of the 5th Army, it was not part of General Joffre's plan to pursue this advantage, and a general retirement on to the line of the Marne was ordered, to which the French forces in the more eastern theatre were directed to conform.

A new army (the 9th) has been formed from three corps in the south by General Joffre, and moved into the space between the right of the 5th and left of the 4th Armies.

Whilst closely adhering to his strategic conception to draw the enemy on at all points until a favourable situation was created from which to assume the offensive, General Joffre found it necessary to modify from day to day the methods by which he sought to attain this object, owing to the development of the enemy's plans and changes in the general situation.

In conformity with the movements of the French forces, my retirement continued practically from day to day. Although we were not severely pressed by the enemy, rearguard actions took place continually.

On September 1, when retiring from the thickly wooded country to the south of Compiègne, the 1st Cavalry Brigade was overtaken by some German cavalry. They momentarily lost a horse artillery battery, and several officers and men were killed and wounded. With the help, however, of some detachments from the 3rd Corps operating on their left, they not only recovered their own guns, but succeeded in capturing twelve of the enemy's.

Similarly, to the eastward, the 1st Corps, retiring south, also got into some very difficult forest country, and a somewhat severe rearguard action ensued at Villers-Cotterets, in which the 4th Guards Brigade suffered considerably.

On September 3 the British forces were in position south of the Marne between Lagny and Signy-Signets. Up to this time I had been requested by General Joffre to defend the passages of the river as long as possible, and to blow up the bridges in my front. After I had made the necessary dispositions, and the destruction of the bridges had been effected, I was asked by the French Commander-in-Chief to continue my retirement to a point some twelve miles in rear of the position I then occupied, with a view to taking up a second position behind the Seine. This retirement was duly carried out. In the meantime the enemy had thrown bridges and crossed the Marne in considerable force, and was threatening the Allies all along the line of the British forces and the 5th and 9th French Armies. Consequently several small outpost actions took place.

On Saturday, September 5, I met the French Commander-in-Chief at his request, and he informed me of his intention to take the offensive forthwith, as he considered conditions were very favourable to success.

General Joffre announced to me his intention of wheeling up the left flank of the 6th Army, pivoting on the Marne, and directing it to move on the Ourcq; cross and attack the flank of the 1st German Army, which was then moving in a south-easterly direction east of that river.

He requested me to effect a change of front to my right—my left resting on the Marne and my right on the 5th Army—to fill the gap between that army and the 6th. I was then to advance against the enemy in my front and join in the general offensive movement.

These combined movements practically commenced on Sunday, September 6, at sunrise; and on that day it may be said that a great battle opened on a front extending from Ermenonville, which was just in front of the left flank of the 6th French Army, through Lizy on the Marne, Mauperthuis, which was about the British centre, Courtecon, which was the left of the 5th French Army, to Estemay and Charleville, the left of the 9th Army under General Foch, and so along the front of the 9th, 4th, and 3rd French Armies to a point north of the fortress of Verdun.

This battle, in so far as the 6th French Army, the British Army, the 5th French Army, and the 9th French Army were concerned, may be said to have concluded on the evening of September 10, by which time the Germans had been driven back to the line Soissons-Reims, with a loss of thousands of prisoners, many guns, and enormous masses of transport.

About September 3 the enemy appears to have changed his plans and to have determined to stop his advance south direct upon Paris, for on September 4 air reconnaissances showed that his main columns were

moving in a south-easterly direction generally east of a line drawn through Nanteuil and Lizy on the Ourcq.

On September 5 several of these columns were observed to have crossed the Marne; whilst German troops, which were observed moving south-east up the left bank of the Ourcq on the 4th, were now reported to be halted and facing that river. Heads of the enemy's columns were seen crossing at Changis, La Ferté, Nogent, Chateau-Thierry, and Mezy.

Considerable German columns of all arms were seen to be converging on Montmirail, whilst before sunset large bivouacs of the enemy were located in the neighbourhood of Coulommiers, south of Rebais, La Ferté-Gaucher and Dagny.

I should conceive it to have been about noon on September 6, after the British forces had changed their front to the right and occupied the line Jouy-le Chatel-Faremoutiers-Villeneuve le Comte, and the advance of the 6th French Army north of the Marne towards the Ourcq became apparent, that the enemy realized the powerful threat that was being made against the flank of his columns moving south-east, and began the great retreat which opened the battle above referred to.

On the evening of September 6, therefore, the fronts and positions of the opposing armies were, roughly, as follows—

ALLIES.

6th French Army.—Right on the Marne at Meux, left towards Betz.

British Forces.—On the line Dagny-Coulommiers-Maison.

5th French Army.—At Courtagon, right on Estemay.

Conneau's Cavalry Corps.—Between the right of the British and the left of the French 5th Army.

GERMANS.

4th Reserve and 2nd Corps.—East of the Ourcq and facing that river.

9th Cavalry Division.—West of Crecy.

2nd Cavalry Division.—North of Coulommiers.

4th Corps.—Rebais.

3rd and 7th Corps.—South-west of Montmirail.

All these troops constituted the 1st German Army, which was directed against the French 6th Army on the Ourcq, and the British forces, and the left of the 5th French Army south of the Marne.

The 2nd German Army (IX, X, X.R. and Guard) was moving against the centre and right of the 5th French Army and the 9th French Army.

On September 7 both the 5th and 6th French Armies were heavily engaged on our flank. The 2nd and 4th Reserve German Corps on the Ourcq vigorously opposed the advance of the French towards that river, but did not prevent the 6th Army from gaining some headway, the Germans themselves suffering serious losses. The French 5th Army threw the enemy back to the line of the Petit Morin River, after inflicting severe losses upon them, especially about Montceaux, which was carried at the point of the bayonet.

The enemy retreated before our advance, covered by his 2nd and 9th and Guard Cavalry Divisions, which suffered severely.

Our cavalry acted with great vigour, especially General De Lisle's Brigade, with the 9th Lancers and 18th Hussars.

On September 8 the enemy continued his retreat northward, and our army was successfully engaged during the day with strong rearguards of all arms on the Petit Morin River, thereby materially assisting the progress of the French Armies on our right and left, against whom the enemy was making his greatest efforts. On both sides the enemy was thrown back with heavy loss. The First Army Corps encountered stubborn resistance at La Trétoire (north of Rebais). The enemy occupied a strong position with infantry and guns on the northern bank of the Petit Morin River; they were dislodged with considerable loss. Several machine guns and many prisoners were captured, and upwards of 200 German dead were left on the ground.

The forcing of the Petit Morin at this point was much assisted by the cavalry and the 1st Division, which crossed higher up the stream.

Later in the day a counter-attack by the enemy was well repulsed by the 1st Army Corps, a great many prisoners and some guns again falling into our hands.

On this day (September 8) the 2nd Army Corps encountered considerable opposition, but drove back the enemy at all points with great loss, making considerable captures.

The 3rd Army Corps also drove back considerable bodies of the enemy's infantry and made some captures.

On September 9 the 1st and 2nd Army Corps forced the passage of the Marne and advanced some miles to the north of it. The 3rd Corps encountered considerable opposition, as the bridge at La Ferté was destroyed and the enemy held the town on the opposite bank in some strength, and thence persistently obstructed the construction of a bridge; so the passage was not effected until after nightfall.

During the day's pursuit the enemy suffered heavy loss in killed and wounded, some hundreds of prisoners fell into our hands, and a battery of eight machine guns was captured by the 2nd Division.

On this day the 6th French Army was heavily engaged west of the River Ourcq. The enemy had largely increased his force opposing them, and very heavy fighting ensued, in which the French were successful throughout.

The left of the 5th French Army reached the neighbourhood of Chateau-Thierry after the most severe fighting, having driven the enemy completely north of the river with great loss.

The fighting of this army in the neighbourhood of Montmirail was very severe.

The advance was resumed at daybreak on the 10th up to the line of the Ourcq, opposed by strong rearguards of all arms. The 1st and 2nd Corps, assisted by the Cavalry Division on the right, the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades on the left, drove the enemy northwards. Thirteen guns, seven machine guns, about 2000 prisoners, and quantities of transport fell into our hands. The enemy left many dead on the field. On this day the French 5th and 6th Armies had little opposition.

As the 1st and 2nd German Armies were now in full retreat, this evening marks the end of the battle which practically commenced on the morning of the 6th instant, and it is at this point in the operations that I am concluding the present despatch.

Although I deeply regret to have had to report heavy losses in killed and wounded throughout these operations, I do not think they have been excessive in view of the magnitude of the great fight, the outlines of which I have only been able very briefly to describe, and the demoralization and loss in killed and wounded which are known to have been caused to the enemy by the vigour and severity of the pursuit.

In concluding this despatch I must call your lordship's special attention to the fact that from Sunday, August 23, up to the present date (September 17), from Mons back almost to the Seine, and from the Seine to the Aisne, the Army under my command has been ceaselessly engaged without one single day's halt or rest of any kind.

Since the date to which in this despatch I have limited my report of the operations, a great battle on the Aisne has been proceeding. A full report of this battle will be made in an early further despatch.

It will, however, be of interest to say here that, in spite of a very determined resistance on the part of the enemy, who is holding in strength and great tenacity a position peculiarly favourable to defence, the battle which

commenced on the evening of the 12th inst. has, so far, forced the enemy back from his first position, secured the passage of the river, and inflicted great loss upon him, including the capture of over 2000 prisoners and several guns.

I have the honour to be,

Your Lordship's most obedient Servant, (Signed) J.D.P. French, Field-Marshal,

Commander-in-Chief,

British Forces in the Field.

INCIDENTS OF THE PERIOD

COVERED BY THE SECOND DESPATCH

BY "EYE-WITNESS" ON THE STAFF OF SIR JOHN FRENCH

ON Friday, September 4, it became apparent that there was an alteration in the direction of advance of almost the whole of the 1st German Army. That Army since the battle near Mons on August 23 had been playing its part in the colossal strategic endeavour to create a Sedan for the Allies by outflanking and enveloping the left of their whole line so as to encircle and drive both British and French to the south.

There was now a change in its objective; and it was observed that the German forces opposite the British were beginning to move in a southeasterly direction instead of continuing southwest on to the Capital.

Leaving a strong rearguard along the line of the River Ourcq (which flows south and joins the Marne at Lizy-sur-Ourcq) to keep off the French 6th Army, which by then had been formed and was to the north-west of Paris, they were evidently executing what amounted to a flank march diagonally across our front. Prepared to ignore the British, as being driven out of the fight, they were initiating an effort to attack the left flank of the French main army which stretched in a long curved line from our right towards the east, and so to carry out against it alone the envelopment which had so far failed against the combined forces of the Allies.

On Saturday, the 5th, this movement on the part of the Germans was continued, and large advanced parties crossed the Marne southwards at Trilport, Sammeroy. La Ferté-sous-Jouarre and Chateau-Thierry. There was considerable fighting with the French 5th Army on the French left, which fell back from its position south of the Marne towards the Seine. On Sunday large hostile forces crossed the Marne, and pushed on through Coulommiers past the British right. Further east they were attacked at night by the French 5th Army, which captured three villages at the point of the bayonet.

An earlier despatch from headquarters gave the following particulars, which are amplified in the above account.

On September 6 the southward advance of the German right reached its extreme points at Coulommiers and Provins, cavalry patrols having penetrated even as far south as Nogent-sur-Seine. This movement was covered by a large flanking force west of the line of the River Ourcq, watching the outer Paris defences and any Allied force that might issue from them. The southward movement of the enemy left his right wing in a dangerous position, as he had evacuated the Creil-Senlis-Compiègne region through which his advance had been pushed.

The Allies attacked this exposed wing both in front and flank on September 8. The covering force was assailed by a French Army based upon the Paris defences, and brought to action on the line Nanteuil-le Haudouin-Meaux. The main portion of the enemy's right wing was attacked frontally by the British Army, which had been transferred from the North to the East of Paris, and by French Corps advancing alongside of it on the line Crécy-Coulommiers-Sézanne.

The combined operations have up to the present been completely successful. The German outer flank was forced back as far as the line of the Ourcq. There it made a strong defence, and executed several vigorous counter-attacks, but was unable to beat off the pressure of the French advance. The main body of the enemy's right wing vainly endeavoured to defend the line of the Grand Morin River, and then that of the Petit Morin.

Pressed back over both of these rivers and threatened on its right owing to the defeat of the covering force by the Allied left, the German right wing retreated over the Marne on September 10. The British Army, with a portion of the French forces on its left, crossed this river below Chateau-Thierry, a movement which obliged the enemy's forces west of the Ourcq, already assailed by the French corps forming the extreme left of the Allies, to give way and to retreat north-eastwards in the direction of Soissons.

Since the 10th the whole of the German right wing has fallen back in considerable disorder, closely followed by the French and British troops. Six thousand prisoners and fifteen guns were captured on the 10th and 11th, and the enemy is reported to be continuing his retirement rapidly over the Aisne, evacuating the Soissons region. The British cavalry is reported to-day to be at Fismes, not far from Reims.

While the German right wing has thus been driven back and thrown into disorder, the French armies further to the east have been strongly engaged with the German centre, which had pushed forward as far as Vitry. Between

the 8th and 10th our Allies were unable to make much impression west of Vitry.

On the 11th, however, this portion of the German Army began to give way, and eventually abandoned Vitry, where the enemy's line of battle was forming a salient under the impulse of French troops between the upper Marne and the Meuse. The French troops are following up the enemy and are driving portion of his forces northwards towards the Argonne forest country.

The 3rd French Army reports to-day that it has captured the entire artillery of a hostile army corps—a capture which probably represents about 160 guns. The enemy is thus in retreat along the whole line west of the Meuse and has suffered gravely in moral, besides encountering heavy losses in personnel and material.

On Monday, September 7, there was a general advance on the part of the Allies in this quarter of the field. Our forces, which had by now been reinforced, pushed on in a northeasterly direction, in co-operation with an advance of the French 5th Army to the north and of the French 6th Army eastwards, against the German rearguard along the Ourcq.

Possibly weakened by the detachment of troops to the eastern theatre of operations, and realizing that the action of the French 6th Army against the line of the Ourcq and the advance of the British placed their own flanking movement in considerable danger of being taken in rear and on its right flank, the Germans on this day commenced to retire towards the north-east. This was the first time that these troops had turned back since their attack at Mons a fortnight before, and, from reports received, the order to retreat when so close to Paris was a bitter disappointment. From letters found on the dead there is no doubt that there was a general impression amongst the enemy's troops that they were about to enter Paris.

On Tuesday, September 8th, the German movement north-eastwards was continued, their rearguards on the south of the Marne being pressed back to that river by our troops and by the French on our right, the latter capturing three villages after a hand-to-hand fight and the infliction of severe loss on the enemy.

The fighting along the Ourcq continued on this day and was of the most sanguinary character, for the Germans had massed a great force of artillery along this line. Very few of their infantry were seen by the French. The French 5th Army also made a fierce attack on the Germans in Montmirail, regaining that place.

On Wednesday, the 9th, the battle between the French 6th Army and what was now the German flank guard along the Ourcq continued. The British

Corps, overcoming some resistance on the River Petit Morin, crossed the Marne in pursuit of the Germans, who were now hastily retreating northwards. One of our corps was delayed by an obstinate defence made by a strong rearguard with machine guns at La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, where the bridge had been destroyed.

On Thursday, September 10, the French 6th Army continued its pressure on the west while the 5th Army, by forced marches, reached the line Château-Thierry-Dormans on the Marne. Our troops also continued the pursuit on the north of the latter river, and after a considerable amount of fighting captured some 1500 prisoners, four guns, six machine guns, and 50 transport wagons.

Many of the enemy were killed and wounded, and the numerous thick woods which dot the country north of the Marne are filled with German stragglers. Most of them appear to have been without food for at least two days. Indeed, in this area of operations the Germans seem to be demoralized and inclined to surrender in small parties, and the general situation appears to be most favourable to the Allies.

Much brutal and senseless damage has been done in the villages occupied by the enemy. Property has been wantonly destroyed, pictures in the chateaux have been ripped up, and the houses generally pillaged. It is stated on unimpeachable authority, also, that the inhabitants have been much ill-treated.

Interesting incidents have occurred during the fighting. On the 10th part of our 2nd Army Corps advancing north found itself marching parallel with another infantry force at some little distance away. At first it was thought that this was another British unit. After some time, however, it was discovered that it was a body of Germans retreating. Measures were promptly taken to head off the enemy, who were surrounded and trapped in a sunken road, where over 400 men surrendered.

On the 10th a small party of French under a non-commissioned officer was cut off and surrounded. After a desperate resistance it was decided to go on fighting to the end. Finally the N.C.O. and one man only were left, both being wounded. The Germans came up and shouted to them to lay down their arms. The German commander, however, signed to them to keep their arms, and asked for permission to shake hands with the wounded non-commissioned officer, who was carried off on his stretcher with his rifle by his side.

The arrival of the reinforcements and the continued advance have delighted the troops, who are full of zeal and anxious to press on.

Quite one of the features of the campaign, on our side, has been the success attained by the Royal Flying Corps. In regard to the collection of information it is impossible either to award too much praise to our aviators for the way they have carried out their duties or to over-estimate the value of the intelligence collected, more especially during the recent advance.

In due course, certain examples of what has been effected may be specified and the far-reaching nature of the results fully explained, but that time has not yet arrived. That the services of our Flying Corps, which has really been on trial, are fully appreciated by our Allies is shown by the following message from the Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies received on the night of September 9 by Field-Marshal Sir John French—

"Please express most particularly to Marshal French my thanks for services rendered on every day by the English Flying Corps. The precision, exactitude, and regularity of the news brought in by its members are evidence of their perfect organization and also of the perfect training of pilots and observers."

To give a rough idea of the amount of work carried out it is sufficient to mention that, during a period of 20 days up to September 10, a daily average of more than nine reconnaissance flights of over 100 miles each has been maintained.

The constant object of our aviators has been to effect the accurate location of the enemy's forces, and, incidentally—since the operations cover so large an area—of our own units. Nevertheless, the tactics adopted for dealing with hostile aircraft are to attack them instantly with one or more British machines.

This has been so far successful that in five cases German pilots or observers have been shot in the air and their machines brought to the ground. As a consequence, the British Flying Corps has succeeded in establishing an individual ascendancy which is as serviceable to us as it is damaging to the enemy. How far it is due to this cause it is not possible at present to ascertain definitely, but the fact remains that the enemy have recently become much less enterprising in their flights. Something in the direction of the mastery of the air has already been gained.

In pursuance of the principle that the main object of military aviators is the collection of information, bomb-dropping has not been indulged in to any great extent. On one occasion a petrol bomb was successfully exploded in a German bivouac at night, while, from a diary found on a dead German cavalry soldier, it has been discovered that a high explosive bomb thrown at a cavalry column from one of our aeroplanes struck an ammunition wagon. The resulting explosion killed 15 of the enemy.

General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien. With the Expeditionary Force

CHAPTER III. — THE STRUGGLE ON THE AISNE

THE THIRD DESPATCH

October 8, 1914.

MY LORD,

I have the honour to report the operations in which the British forces in France have been engaged since the evening of September 10.

1. In the early morning of the 11th the further pursuit of the enemy was commenced, and the three corps crossed the Ourcq practically unopposed, the cavalry reaching the line of the Aisne River; the 3rd and 5th Brigades south of Soissons, the 1st, 2nd, and 4th on the high ground at Couvrelles and Cerseuil.

On the afternoon of the 12th from the opposition encountered by the 6th French Army to the west of Soissons, by the 3rd Corps south-east of that place, by the 2nd Corps south of Missy and Vailly, and certain indications all along the line, I formed the opinion that the enemy had, for the moment at any rate, arrested his retreat, and was preparing to dispute the passage of the Aisne with some vigour.

South of Soissons the Germans were holding Mont de Paris against the attack of the right of the 6th French Army when the 3rd Corps reached the neighbourhood of Buzancy, south-east of that place. With the assistance of the artillery of the 3rd Corps the French drove them back across the river at Soissons, where they destroyed the bridges.

The heavy artillery fire which was visible for several miles in a westerly direction in the valley of the Aisne showed that the 6th French Army was meeting with strong opposition all along the line.

On this day the cavalry under General Allenby reached the neighbourhood of Braine, and did good work in clearing the town and the high ground beyond it of strong hostile detachments. The Queen's Bays are particularly mentioned by the General as having assisted greatly in the success of this operation. They were well supported by the 3rd Division, which on this night bivouacked at Brenelle, south of the river.

The 5th Division approached Missy, but were unable to make headway.

The 1st Army Corps reached the neighbourhood of Vauxcéré without much opposition.

In this manner the battle of the Aisne commenced.

2. The Aisne Valley runs generally east and west, and consists of a flat-bottomed depression of width varying from half a mile to two miles, down which the river follows a winding course to the west at some points near the

southern slopes of the valley and at others near the northern. The high ground both on the north and south of the river is approximately 400 ft. above the bottom of the valley, and is very similar in character, as are both slopes of the valley itself, which are broken into numerous rounded spurs and reentrants. The most prominent of the former are the Chivre spur on the right bank and Sermoise spur on the left. Near the latter place the general plateau on the south is divided by a subsidiary valley of much the same character, down which the small River Vesle flows to the main stream near Sermoise. The slopes of the plateau overlooking the Aisne on the north and south are of varying steepness, and are covered with numerous patches of wood, which also stretch upwards and backwards over the edge on to the top of the high ground. There are several villages and small towns dotted about in the valley itself and along its sides, the chief of which is the town of Soissons.

The Aisne is a sluggish stream of some 170 ft. in breadth, but, being 15 ft. deep in the centre, it is unfordable. Between Soissons on the west and Villers on the east (the part of the river attacked and secured by the British forces) there are eleven road bridges across it. On the north bank a narrow-gauge railway runs from Soissons to Vailly, where it crosses the river and continues eastward along the south bank. From Soissons to Sermoise a double line of railway runs along the south bank, turning at the latter place up the Vesle Valley towards Bazoches.

The position held by the enemy is a very strong one, either for a delaying action or for a defensive battle. One of its chief military characteristics is that from the high ground on neither side can the top of the plateau on the other side be seen except for small stretches. This is chiefly due to the woods on the edges of the slopes. Another important point is that all the bridges are under either direct or high-angle artillery fire.

The tract of country above described, which lies north of the Aisne, is well adapted to concealment, and was so skilfully turned to account by the enemy as to render it impossible to judge the real nature of his opposition to our passage of the river, or to accurately gauge his strength; but I have every reason to conclude that strong rearguards of at least three army corps were holding the passages on the early morning of the 13th.

3. On that morning I ordered the British forces to advance and make good the Aisne.

The 1st Corps and the cavalry advanced on the river. The 1st Division was directed on Chanouille, via the canal bridge at Bourg, and the 2nd Division on Courtecon and Presles, via Pont-Arcy and on the canal to the north of Braye, via Chavonne. On the right the cavalry and 1st Division met with slight opposition, and found a passage by means of the canal which crosses

the river by an aqueduct. The Division was, therefore, able to press on, supported by the Cavalry Division on its outer flank, driving back the enemy in front of it.

On the left the leading troops of the 2nd Division reached the river by nine o'clock. The 5th Infantry Brigade were only enabled to cross, in single file and under considerable shell fire, by means of the broken girder of the bridge which was not entirely submerged in the river. The construction of a pontoon bridge was at once undertaken, and was completed by five o'clock in the afternoon.

On the extreme left the 4th Guards Brigade met with severe opposition at Chavonne, and it was only late in the afternoon that it was able to establish a foothold on the northern bank of the river by ferrying one battalion across in boats.

By nightfall the 1st Division occupied the area Moulins-Paissy-Geny, with posts in the village of Vendresse.

The 2nd Division bivouacked as a whole on the southern bank of the river, leaving only the 5th Brigade on the north bank to establish a bridge head.

The 2nd Corps found all the bridges in front of them destroyed, except that of Condé, which was in possession of the enemy, and remained so until the end of the battle.

In the approach to Missy, where the 5th Division eventually crossed, there is some open ground which was swept by heavy fire from the opposite bank. The 13th Brigade was, therefore, unable to advance; but the 14th, which was directed to the east of Venizel at a less exposed point, was rafted across, and by night established itself with its left at St. Marguerite. They were followed by the 15th Brigade, and later on both the 14th and 15th supported the 4th Division on their left in repelling a heavy counter-attack on the 3rd Corps.

On the morning of the 13th the 3rd Corps found the enemy had established himself in strength on the Vregny Plateau. The road bridge at Venizel was repaired during the morning, and a reconnaissance was made with a view to throwing a pontoon bridge at Soissons.

The 12th Infantry Brigade crossed at Venizel, and was assembled at Bucy Le Long by 1 p.m., but the bridge was so far damaged that artillery could only be man-handled across it. Meanwhile the construction of a bridge was commenced close to the road bridge at Venizel.

At 2 p.m. the 12th Infantry Brigade attacked in the direction of Chivres and Vregny with the object of securing the high ground east of Chivres, as a necessary preliminary to a further advance northwards. This attack made

good progress, but at 5.30 p.m. the enemy's artillery and machine gun fire from the direction of Vregny became so severe that no further advance could be made. The positions reached were held till dark.

The pontoon bridge at Venizel was completed 53° p-ni., when the 10th Infantry Brigade crossed the river and moved to Bucy Le Long.

The 19th Infantry Brigade moved to Billy-sur-Aisne, and before dark all the artillery of the division had crossed the river, with the exception of the heavy battery and one brigade of field artillery.

During the night the positions gained by the 12th Infantry Brigade to the east of the stream running through Chivres were handed over to the 5th Division.

The section of the bridging train allotted to the 3rd Corps began to arrive in the neighbourhood of Soissons late in the afternoon, when an attempt to throw a heavy pontoon bridge at Soissons had to be abandoned, owing to the fire of the enemy's heavy howitzers.

In the evening the enemy retired at all points and entrenched himself on the high ground about two miles north of the river, along which runs the Chemin-des-Dames. Detachments of infantry, however, strongly entrenched in commanding points down slopes of the various spurs, were left in front of all three corps, with powerful artillery in support of them.

During the night of the 13th and on the 14th and following days the field companies were incessantly at work night and day. Eight pontoon bridges and one foot bridge were thrown across the river under generally very heavy artillery fire, which was incessantly kept up on to most of the crossings after completion. Three of the road bridges, i.e., Venizel, Missy, and Vailly, and the railway bridge east of Vailly were temporarily repaired so as to take foot traffic and the Villers Bridge made fit to carry weights up to six tons.

Preparations were also made for the repair of the Missy, Vailly, and Bourg Bridges, so as to take mechanical transport.

The weather was very wet and added to the difficulties by cutting up the already indifferent approaches, entailing a large amount of work to repair and improve.

The operations of the field companies during this most trying time are worthy of the best traditions of the Royal Engineers.

4. On the evening of the 14th it was still impossible to decide whether the enemy was only making a temporary halt, covered by rearguards, or whether he intended to stand and defend the position.

With a view to clearing up the situation, I ordered a general advance.

The action of the 1st Corps on this day under the direction and command of Sir Douglas Haig was of so skilful, bold, and decisive a character that he gained positions which alone have enabled me to maintain my position for more than three weeks of very severe fighting on the north bank of the river.

The corps was directed to cross the line Moulins-Moussy by 7 a.m.

On the right the General Officer Commanding the 1st Division directed the 2nd Infantry Brigade (which was in billets and bivouacked about Moulins), and the 25th Artillery Brigade (less one battery), under General Bulfin, to move forward before daybreak, in order to protect the advance of the division sent up the valley to Vendresse. An officers' patrol sent out by this brigade reported a considerable force of the enemy near the factory north of Troyon, and the Brigadier accordingly directed two regiments (the King's Royal Rifles and the Royal Sussex Regiment) to move at 3 a.m. The Northamptonshire Regiment was ordered to move at 4 a.m. to occupy the spur east of Troyon. The remaining regiment of the brigade (the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment) moved at 5.30 a.m. to the village of Vendresse. The factory was found to be held in considerable strength by the enemy, and the Brigadier ordered the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment to support the King's Royal Rifles and the Sussex Regiment. Even with this support the force was unable to make headway, and on the arrival of the 1st Brigade the Coldstream Guards were moved up to support the right of the leading brigade (the 2nd), while the remainder of the 1st Brigade supported its left.

About noon the situation was, roughly, that the whole of these two brigades were extended along a line running east and west, north of the line Troyon and south of the Chemin-des-Dames. A party of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment had seized and were holding the factory. The enemy held a line of entrenchments north and east of the factory in considerable strength, and every effort to advance against this line was driven back by heavy shell and machine-gun fire. The morning was wet, and a heavy mist hung over the hills, so that the 25th Artillery Brigade and the Divisional Artillery were unable to render effective support to the advanced troops until about nine o'clock.

By ten o'clock the 3rd Infantry Brigade had reached a point one mile south of Vendresse, and from there it was ordered to continue the line of the 1st Brigade and to connect with and help the right of the 2nd Division. A strong hostile column was found to be advancing, and by a vigorous counter-stroke with two of his battalions the Brigadier checked the advance of this column and relieved the pressure on the 2nd Division. From this period until late in the afternoon the fighting consisted of a series of attacks and counter-attacks. The counter-strokes by the enemy were delivered at first with great

vigour, but later on they decreased in strength, and all were driven off with heavy loss.

On the left the 6th Infantry Brigade had been ordered to cross the river and to pass through the line held during the preceding night by the 5th Infantry Brigade and occupy the Courtecon Ridge, whilst a detached force, consisting of the 4th Guards Brigade and the 36th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, under Brigadier-General Perceval, were ordered to proceed to a point east of the village of Ostel.

The 6th Infantry Brigade crossed the river at Pont-Arcy, moved up the valley towards Braye, and at 9 a.m. had reached the line Tilleul-La Buvelle. On this line they came under heavy artillery and rifle fire, and were unable to advance until supported by the 34th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, and the 44th Howitzer Brigade and the Heavy Artillery.

The 4th Guards Brigade crossed the river at 10 a.m., and met with very heavy opposition. It had to pass through dense woods; field artillery support was difficult to obtain; but one section of the field battery pushed up to and within the firing line. At 1 p.m. the left of the brigade was south of the Ostel Ridge.

At this period of the action the enemy obtained a footing between the 1st and 2nd Corps, and threatened to cut the communications of the latter.

Sir Douglas Haig was very hardly pressed, and had no reserve in hand. I placed the cavalry division at his disposal, part of which he skilfully used to prolong and secure the left flank of the Guards Brigade. Some heavy fighting ensued, which resulted in the enemy being driven back with heavy loss.

About four o'clock the weakening of the counterattacks by the enemy and other indications tended to show that his resistance was decreasing, and a general advance was ordered by the Army Corps Commander. Although meeting with considerable opposition, and coming under very heavy artillery and rifle fire, the position of the corps at the end of the day's operations extended from the Chemin-des-Dames on the right, through Chivy, to Le Cour de Soupir, with the 1st Cavalry Brigade extending to the Chavonne-Soissons road.

On the right the corps was in close touch with the French Moroccan troops of the 18th Corps, which were entrenched in echelon to its right rear. During the night they entrenched this position.

Throughout the battle of the Aisne this advanced and commanding position was maintained, and I cannot speak too highly of the valuable services rendered by Sir Douglas Haig and the army corps under his command. Day after day and night after night the enemy's infantry has been hurled against him in violent counter-attack, which has never on any one occasion

succeeded, whilst the trenches all over his position have been under continuous heavy artillery fire.

The operations of the 1st Corps on this day resulted in the capture of several hundred prisoners, some field pieces, and machine guns.

The casualties were very severe, one brigade alone losing three of its four colonels.

The 3rd Division commenced a further advance, and had nearly reached the plateau of Aizy when they were driven back by a powerful counterattack supported by heavy artillery. The division, however, fell back in the best order, and finally entrenched itself about a mile north of Vailly Bridge, effectively covering the passage.

The 4th and 5th Divisions were unable to do more than maintain their ground.

5. On the morning of the 15th, after close examination of the position, it became clear to me that the enemy was making a determined stand, and this view was confirmed by reports which reached me from the French Armies fighting on my right and left, which clearly showed that a strongly entrenched line of defence was being taken up from the north of Compiègne, eastward and south-eastward, along the whole valley of the Aisne up to and beyond Reims.

A few days previously the fortress of Maubauge fell, and a considerable quantity of siege artillery was brought down from that place to strengthen the enemy's position in front of us.

During the 15th shells fell in our position which have been judged by experts to be thrown by eight-inch siege guns with a range of 10,000 yards. Throughout the whole course of the battle our troops have suffered very heavily from this fire, although its effect latterly was largely mitigated by more efficient and thorough entrenching, the necessity for which I impressed strongly upon army corps commanders. In order to assist them in this work all villages within the area of our occupation were searched for heavy entrenching tools, a large number of which were collected.

In view of the peculiar formation of the ground on the north side of the river between Missy and Soissons, and its extraordinary adaptability to a force on the defensive, the 5th Division found it impossible to maintain its position on the southern edge of the Chivres Plateau, as the enemy in possession of the village of Vregny to the west was able to bring a flank fire to bear upon it. The Division had, therefore, to retire to a line the left of which was at the village of Marguerite, and thence ran by the north edge of Missy back to the river to the east of that place.

With great skill and tenacity Sir Charles Fergusson maintained this position throughout the whole battle, although his trenches were necessarily on lower ground than that occupied by the enemy on the southern edge of the plateau, which was only 400 yards away.

General Hamilton with the 3rd Division vigorously attacked to the north, and regained all the ground he had lost on the 15th, which throughout the battle has formed a most powerful and effective bridge head.

6. On the 16th the 6th Division came up into line.

It had been my intention to direct the 1st Corps to attack and seize the enemy's position on the Chemin-des-Dames, supporting it with this new reinforcement. I hoped from the position thus gained to bring effective fire to bear across the front of the 3rd Division which, by securing the advance of the latter, would also take the pressure off the 5th Division and the 3rd Corps.

But any further advance of the 1st Corps would have dangerously exposed my right flank. And, further, I learned from the French Commander-in-Chief that he was strongly reinforcing the 6th French Army on my left, with the intention of bringing up the Allied left to attack the enemy's flank, and thus compel his retirement. I therefore sent the 6th Division to join the 3rd Corps, with orders to keep it on the south side of the river, as it might be available in general reserve.

On the 17th, 18th, and 19th the whole of our line was heavily bombarded, and the 1st Corps was constantly and heavily engaged. On the afternoon of the 17th the right flank of the 1st Division was seriously threatened. A counterattack was made by the Northamptonshire Regiment in combination with the Queen's, and one battalion of the Divisional Reserve was moved up in support. The Northamptonshire Regiment, under cover of mist, crept up to within a hundred yards of the enemy's trenches and charged with the bayonet, driving them out of the trenches and up the hill. A very strong force of hostile infantry was then disclosed on the crest line. This new line was enfiladed by part of the Queen's and the King's Royal Rifles, which wheeled to their left on the extreme right of our infantry line, and were supported by a squadron of cavalry on their outer flank. The enemy's attack was ultimately driven back with heavy loss.

On the 18th, during the night, the Gloucestershire Regiment advanced from their position near Chivy, filled in the enemy's trenches and captured two Maxim guns.

On the extreme right the Queen's were heavily attacked, but the enemy was repulsed with great loss. About midnight the attack was renewed on the 1st Division, supported by artillery fire, but was again repulsed.

Shortly after midnight an attack was made on the left of the 2nd Division with considerable force, which was also thrown back.

At about 1 p.m. on the 19th the 2nd Division drove back a heavy infantry attack strongly supported by artillery fire. At dusk the attack was renewed and again repulsed.

On the 18th I discussed with the General Officer Commanding the 2nd Army Corps and his Divisional Commanders the possibility of driving the enemy out of Condé, which lay between his two divisions, and seizing the bridge which has remained throughout in his possession.

As, however, I found that the bridge was closely commanded from all points on the south side and that satisfactory arrangements were made to prevent any issue from it by the enemy by day or night, I decided that it was not necessary to incur the losses which an attack would entail, as, in view of the position of the 2nd and 3rd Corps, the enemy could make no use of Condé, and would be automatically forced out of it by any advance which might become possible for us.

7. On this day information reached me from General Joffre that he had found it necessary to make a new plan, and to attack and envelop the German right flank.

It was now evident to me that the battle in which we had been engaged since the 12th instant must last some days longer, until the effect of this new flank movement could be felt, and a way opened to drive the enemy from his positions.

It thus became essential to establish some system of regular relief in the trenches, and I have used the infantry of the 6th Division for this purpose with good results. The relieved brigades were brought back alternately south of the river, and, with the artillery of the 6th Division, formed a general reserve on which I could rely in case of necessity.

The cavalry has rendered most efficient and ready help in the trenches, and have done all they possibly could to lighten the arduous and trying task which has of necessity fallen to the lot of the infantry.

On the evening of the 19th, and throughout the 20th, the enemy again commenced to show considerable activity. On the former night a severe counter-attack on the 3rd Division was repulsed with considerable loss, and from early on Sunday morning various hostile attempts were made on the trenches of the 1st Division. During the day the enemy suffered another severe repulse in front of the 2nd Division, losing heavily in the attempt. In the course of the afternoon the enemy made desperate attempts against the trenches all along the front of the 1st Corps, but with similar results.

After dark the enemy again attacked the 2nd Division, only to be again driven back.

Our losses on these two days were considerable, but the number, as obtained, of the enemy's killed and wounded vastly exceeded them.

As the troops of the 1st Army Corps were much exhausted by this continual fighting, I reinforced Sir Douglas Haig with a brigade from the reserve, and called upon the 1st Cavalry Division to assist them.

On the night of the 21st another violent counterattack was repulsed by the 3rd Division, the enemy losing heavily.

On the 23rd the four six-inch howitzer batteries, which I had asked to be sent from home, arrived. Two batteries were handed over to the 2nd Corps and two to the 1st Corps. They were brought into action on the 24th with very good results.

Our experiences in this campaign seem to point to the employment of more heavy guns of a larger calibre in great battles which last for several days, during which time powerful entrenching work on both sides can be carried out.

These batteries were used with considerable effect on the 24th and the following days.

8. On the 23rd the action of General de Castelnau's army on the Allied left developed considerably, and apparently withdrew considerable forces of the enemy away from the centre and east. I am not aware whether it was due to this cause or not, but until the 26th it appeared as though the enemy's opposition in our front was weakening. On that day, however, a very marked renewal of activity commenced. A constant and vigorous artillery bombardment was maintained all day, and the Germans in front of the 1st Division were observed to be "sapping" up to our lines and trying to establish new trenches. Renewed counter-attacks were delivered and beaten off during the course of the day, and in the afternoon a well-timed attack by the 1st Division stopped the enemy's entrenching work.

During the night of 27th-28th the enemy again made the most determined attempts to capture the trenches of the 1st Division, but without the slightest success.

Similar attacks were reported during these three days all along the line of the Allied front, and it is certain that the enemy then made one last great effort to establish ascendancy. He was, however, unsuccessful everywhere, and is reported to have suffered heavy losses. The same futile attempts were made all along our front up to the evening of the 28th, when they died away, and have not since been renewed.

On former occasions I have brought to your lordship's notice the valuable services performed during this campaign by the Royal Artillery. Throughout the battle of the Aisne they have displayed the same skill, endurance, and tenacity, and I deeply appreciate the work they have done.

Sir David Henderson and the Royal Flying Corps under his command have again proved their incalculable value. Great strides have been made in the development of the use of aircraft in the tactical sphere by establishing effective communication between aircraft and units in action.

It is difficult to describe adequately and accurately the great strain to which officers and men were subjected almost every hour of the day and night throughout this battle.

I have described above the severe character of the artillery fire which was directed from morning till night, not only upon the trenches, but over the whole surface of the ground occupied by our forces. It was not until a few days before the position was evacuated that the heavy guns were removed and the fire slackened. Attack and counter-attack occurred at all hours of the night and day throughout the whole position, demanding extreme vigilance, and permitting only a minimum of rest.

The fact that between September 12 to the date of this despatch the total numbers of killed, wounded, and missing reached the figures amounting to 561 officers, 12,980 men, proves the severity of the struggle.

The tax on the endurance of the troops was further increased by the heavy rain and cold which prevailed for some ten or twelve days of this trying time.

The battle of the Aisne has once more demonstrated the splendid spirit, gallantry, and devotion which animates the officers and men of his Majesty's Forces.

With reference to the last paragraph of my despatch of September 7, I append the names of officers, non-commissioned officers, and men brought forward for special mention by Army Corps commanders and heads of departments for services rendered from the commencement of the campaign up to the present date.

I entirely agree with these recommendations and beg to submit them for your lordship's consideration.

I further wish to bring forward the names of the following officers who have rendered valuable service: General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien and Lieutenant-General Sir Douglas Haig (commanding 1st and 2nd Corps respectively) I have already mentioned in the present and former despatches for particularly marked and distinguished service in critical situations.

Since the commencement of the campaign they have carried out all my orders and instructions with the utmost ability.

Lieutenant-General W. P. Pulteney took over the command of the 3rd Corps just before the commencement of the battle of the Marne. Throughout the subsequent operations he showed himself to be a most capable commander in the field, and has rendered very valuable services.

Major-General E. H. H. Allenby and Major-General H. de la P. Gough have proved themselves to be cavalry leaders of a high order, and I am deeply indebted to them. The undoubted moral superiority which our cavalry has obtained over that of the enemy has been due to the skill with which they have turned to the best account the qualities inherent in the splendid troops they command.

In my despatch of September 7 I mentioned the name of Brigadier-General Sir David Henderson and his valuable work in command of the Royal Flying Corps, and I have once more to express my deep appreciation of the help he has since rendered me.

Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Murray has continued to render me invaluable help as Chief of the Staff, and in his arduous and responsible duties he has been ably assisted by Major-General Henry Wilson, Sub-Chief.

Lieutenant-General Sir Nevil Macready and Lieutenant-General Sir William Robertson have continued to perform excellent service as Adjutant-General and Quartermaster-General respectively.

The Director of Army Signals, Lieutenant-Colonel J. S. Fowler, has materially assisted the operations by the skill and energy which he has displayed in the working of the important department over which he presides.

My Military Secretary, Brigadier-General the Hon. W. Lambton, has performed his arduous and difficult duties with much zeal and great efficiency.

I am anxious also to bring to your lordship's notice the following names of officers of my Personal Staff, who throughout these arduous operations have shown untiring zeal and energy in the performance of their duties—

AIDES-DE-CAMP.

Lieutenant-Colonel Stanley Barry.

Lieutenant-Colonel Lord Brooke.

Major Fitzgerald Watt.

EXTRA AIDE-DE-CAMP.

Captain the Hon. F. E. Guest.

PRIVATE SECRETARY.

Lieutenant-Colonel Brindsley Fitzgerald.

Major his Royal Highness Prince Arthur of Connaught, K.G., joined my staff as Aide-de-Camp on September 14.

His Royal Highness's intimate knowledge of languages enabled me to employ him with great advantage on confidential missions of some importance, and his services have proved of considerable value.

I cannot close this despatch without informing your lordship of the valuable services rendered by the chief of the French Military Mission at my headquarters, Colonel Victor Huguet, of the French Artillery. He has displayed tact and judgment of a high order in many difficult situations, and has rendered conspicuous service to the Allied cause.

I have the honour to be,

Your Lordship's most obedient Servant, (Signed) J.D.P. French, Field-Marshal,

Commander-in-Chief, British Forces in the Field.

INCIDENTS OF THE PERIOD

COVERED BY THE THIRD DESPATCH

BY "EYE-WITNESS" ON THE STAFF OF SIR JOHN FRENCH

SINCE Thursday, September 10, the Army has made steady progress in its endeavour to drive back the enemy in co-operation with the French. The country across which it has had to force its way, and will have to continue to do so, is undulating and covered with patches of thick wood. Within the area which faced the British before the advance commenced, right up to Laon, the chief feature of tactical importance is the fact that there are six rivers running right across the direction of advance, at all of which it was possible that the Germans might make resistance.

These are, in order from the south, the Marne, the Ourcq, the Vesle, the Aisne, the Ailette, and the Oise. The enemy held the line of the Marne, which was crossed by our forces on September 9 as a purely rearguard operation; our passage of the Ourcq, which here runs almost due east and west, was not contested; the Vesle was only lightly held; while the resistance along the Aisne, both against French and British, has been and still is of a determined character.

The course of the operations during September 11, 12, and 13 has been as follows: On Friday, the 11th, but little opposition was met with by us along any part of our front, and the direction of advance was, for the purpose of cooperating with our Allies, turned slightly to the north-east. The day was

spent in pushing forward and in gathering in various hostile detachments, and by nightfall our forces had reached a line to the north of the Ourcq extending from Oulchy-le-Chateau to Long Pont.

On this day there was also a general advance on the part of the French along their whole line, which ended in substantial success, in one portion of the field Duke Albrecht of Wurtemberg's 4th Army being driven back across the Saulx, and elsewhere the whole of the corps artillery of a German corps being captured. Several German colours also were taken.

It was only on this day that the full extent of the victory gained by the Allies on the 8th was appreciated by them, and the moral effect of this success has been enormous. An order dated the 6th or 7th September, by the Commander of the German 7th Corps, was picked up, in which it was stated that the great object of the war was about to be attained, since the French were going to accept battle, and that upon the result of this battle would depend the issue of the war and the honour of the German Armies.

It seems probable that the Germans not only expected to find that the British Army was beyond the power of assuming the offensive for some time, but counted on the French having been driven back on to the line of the Seine; and that, though surprised to find the latter moving forward against them after they had crossed the Marne, they were in no wise deterred from making a great effort.

On Saturday, September 12, the enemy were found to be occupying a very formidable position opposite to us on the north of the Aisne. At Soissons they held both sides of the river and an entrenched line on the hills to the north. Of eight road bridges and two railway bridges crossing the Aisne within our section of front, seven of the former and both of the latter had been demolished.

Working from west to east our 3rd Army Corps gained some high ground south of the Aisne overlooking the Aisne valley east of Soissons. Here a long-range artillery duel between our guns and those of the French on our left, and the enemy's artillery in the hills continued during the greater part of the day and did not cease until nearly midnight. The enemy had a very large number of heavy howitzers in well-concealed positions. The movement of this Army Corps was effected in co-operation with that of the French 6th Army on our left, which gained the southern half of the town during the night. The 2nd Army Corps did not cross the Aisne.

The 1st Army Corps got over the River Vesle to the south of the Aisne after the crossing had been secured by the 1st Cavalry Division. It then reached a line south of the Aisne practically without fighting. At Braine the 1st Cavalry

Division met with considerable opposition from infantry and machine guns holding the town and guarding the bridge.

With the aid of some of our infantry it gained possession of the town about midday, driving the enemy to the north. Some hundred prisoners were captured round Braine, where the Germans had thrown a large amount of field-gun ammunition into the river, where it was visible under two feet of water. On our right the French reached the line of the river Vesle.

On this day began the action along the Aisne which is not yet finished, and which may be merely of a rearguard nature on a large scale, or may be the commencement of a battle of a more serious nature. It rained heavily on Saturday afternoon and all through the night, which severely handicapped the transport.

On Sunday, September 13, an extremely strong resistance was encountered along the whole of our front, which was some fifteen miles in length. The action still consisted for the most part of long-range gun fire, that of the Germans being to a great extent from their heavy howitzers, which were firing from cleverly concealed positions. Some of the actual crossings of the Aisne were guarded by strong detachments of infantry with machine guns. By nightfall portions of all three corps were across the river, the cavalry returning to the south side. By this night or early next morning three pontoon bridges had been built, and our troops also managed to get across the river by means of a bridge carrying the canal over the river, which had not been destroyed.

On our left the French pressed on, but were prevented by artillery fire from building a pontoon bridge at Soissons. A large number of infantry, however, crossed in single file on the top of one girder of the railway bridge which was left standing.

During the last three or four days many isolated parties of Germans have been discovered hiding in the numerous woods a long way behind our line. As a rule they seem glad to surrender, and the condition of some of them may be gathered from the following incident. An officer, who was proceeding along the road in charge of a number of led horses, received information that there were some of the enemy in the neighbourhood. Upon seeing them he gave the order to charge, whereupon three German officers and 106 men surrendered.

The following are some details of the conduct of the enemy in occupation of three of the small towns to the north of Paris—

At Senlis it is stated, on what appears to be good authority, that a poacher shot one German soldier and wounded another as the forces entered the town. The German commander then assembled the Mayor of the town and

five other leading citizens and forced them to kneel before graves which had already been dug.

Requisition was made for various supplies, and the six citizens were then taken to a neighbouring field and shot. According to the corroborative evidence of several independent persons, some twenty-four people, including women and children, were also shot. The town was then pillaged, and was fired in several places before it was evacuated. It is believed that the cathedral was not damaged, but many houses were destroyed. Creil was also thoroughly pillaged and many houses were burnt.

General von Kluck. In command of the German Right Wing.

At Crépy on September 3 various articles were requisitioned under threat of a fine of 100,000 f. for every day's delay in the delivery of the goods. The following list shows the amounts and natures of the supplies demanded, and also the actual quantities furnished—

Requisitioned	Furnished
Flour, 20,000 kilos	20,000 kilos
Dried vegetables, 5,000 kilos	800 kilos
Coffee, 1,000 kilos	809 kilos
Salt, 1,000 kilos	2,000 kilos
Oats, 100,000 kilos	55,000 kilos
Red wine, 2,500 litres	2,500 litres
All smoked meats, ham, cloth, new boots, tobacco, biscuits, handkerchiefs, shirts, braces, stockings, horseshoes, bicycles, motor-cars, petrol 61 prs. of boots 91 bicycles 15 motor tyres 6 inner tubes	

Immediately on arrival a proclamation was issued by the commander of the German division. The main points were:—

That all arms were to be handed in at the Town Hall at once. That all civilians found with arms would be shot at once. That no person was to be in the street after dark. That no lights were to be maintained in the houses or streets at night. That the doors of all houses were to be left open. That the

inhabitants were not to collect in groups. That any obstruction of the German troops or threatening of them would be immediately punished by death. That German money was to be accepted at the rate of 1 mark for 1f. 25.

At Villers Gotterets the Mayor appears to have behaved very judiciously, and, though supplies far in excess of the capabilities of the place were demanded, the town was not seriously damaged. The Germans evacuated the place on September 11 in such haste that they left behind a large amount of the bread requisitioned. It was stated by the inhabitants that the enemy destroyed and abandoned fifteen motor-lorries, seven guns, and ammunition wagons.

Reims was occupied by the enemy on September 3. It was reoccupied by the French after considerable fighting on the 13th. On the 12th a proclamation, a copy of which is in possession of the British Army, was posted all over the town. A literal translation of this poster is given below—

PROCLAMATION

In the event of an action being fought either to-day or in the immediate future in the neighbourhood of Reims, or in the town itself, the inhabitants are warned that they must remain absolutely calm and must in no way try to take part in the fighting. They must not attempt to attack either isolated soldiers or detachments of the German Army. The section of barricades, the taking up of paving stones in the streets in a way to hinder the movements of troops, or, in a word, any action that may embarrass the German Army, is formally forbidden.

With a view to securing adequately the safety of the troops and to instil calm into the population of Reims the persons named below have been seized as hostages by the Commander-in-Chief of the German Army. These hostages will be hanged at the slightest attempt at disorder. Also the town will be totally or partly burnt and the inhabitants will be hanged for any infraction of the above.

By order of the German authorities,

THE MAYOR (Dr. Langlef). Reims, September 12, 1914.

Here follow the names of eighty-one of the principal inhabitants of Reims with their addresses, including four priests, ending with the words "and some others."

On the 14th September the Germans were making a determined resistance along the River Aisne. The opposition, which it was at first thought might possibly be of a rearguard nature not entailing material delay to our progress, has developed, and has proved to be more serious than was

anticipated. The action now being fought by the Germans along their line may, it is true, have been undertaken in order to gain time for some strategic operation or move, and may not be their main stand.

But if this be so, the fighting is naturally on a scale which, as to extent of ground covered and duration of resistance, makes it indistinguishable in its progress from what is known as a "pitched battle," though the enemy certainly showed signs of considerable disorganization during the earlier days of their retirement.

Whether it was originally intended by them to defend the position they took up as strenuously as they have done, or whether the delay gained for them during the 12th and 13th by their artillery has enabled them to develop their resistance and to reinforce their line to an extent not originally contemplated, cannot yet be said.

So far as we are concerned the action still being contested is the battle of the Aisne, for we are fighting just across that river along the whole of our front. To the east and west the struggle is not confined to the valley of that river, though it will probably bear its name.² The progress of our operations and of those French Armies nearest to us for the 14th, 15th, 16th, and 17th will now be described.

On Monday, the 14th, those of our troops which had on the previous day crossed the Aisne after driving in the German rearguard on that evening found portions of the enemy's forces in prepared defensive positions on the plateau on the right bank, and could do little more than secure a footing north of the river. This, however, they maintained in spite of two counter-attacks, delivered at dusk and at 10 p.m., in which the fighting was severe.

During the 14th strong reinforcements of our troops were passed to the north bank, the troops crossing by ferry, by pontoon bridges, and by the remains of the permanent bridges. Close co-operation with the French forces was maintained, and the general progress made was good.

Although the opposition was vigorous and the state of the roads after the heavy rain made movements slow, one division alone failed to secure the ground it expected to. The 1st Army Corps, after repulsing repeated attacks, captured 600 prisoners and 12 guns; the cavalry also took a number of prisoners. Many of the Germans taken belong to Reserve and Landwehr formations, which fact appears to indicate that the enemy is compelled to draw on the older classes of soldiers to fill the gaps in his ranks.

There was heavy rain through the night of the 14th-15th, and during the 15th September the situation of the British forces underwent no essential change, but it became more and more evident that the defensive preparations made by the enemy were more extensive than was at first

apparent. In order to counterbalance these, measures were taken by us to economize troops and to secure protection from the hostile artillery fire, which was very fierce, and our men continued to improve their entrenchments.

The Germans bombarded our lines nearly all day, using heavy guns, brought no doubt from before Maubeuge, as well as those with the corps. All their counter-attacks, however, failed, although in some places they were repeated six times; one made on the 4th Guards Brigade was repulsed with heavy slaughter. An attempt to advance slightly made by part of our line was unsuccessful as regards gain in ground, but led to withdrawal of part of the enemy's infantry and artillery.

Further counter-attacks made during the night were beaten off. Rain came on towards evening and continued intermittently until 9 a.m. on the 16th. Besides adding to the discomfort of the soldiers holding open trenches in the firing line, the wet weather to some extent hampered the motor transport service, which was also hindered by the broken bridges.

On Wednesday, the 16th, there was little change in the situation opposite the British. The efforts made by the enemy were less active than on the previous day, though their bombardment continued throughout the morning and evening. Our artillery fire drove the defenders off one of the salients of their position, but they returned in the evening. Forty prisoners were taken by the 3rd Division.

On Thursday, September 17, the situation still remained unchanged in its essentials. The German heavy artillery fire was more active than on the previous day. The only infantry attacks made by the enemy were on the extreme right of our position, and, as had happened before, were repulsed with heavy loss, chiefly on this occasion by our field artillery.

In order to convey some idea of the nature of the fighting it may be said that along the greater part of our front the Germans have been driven back from the forward slopes on the north of the river. Their infantry are holding strong lines of trenches amongst and along the edges of the numerous woods which crown these slopes. These trenches are elaborately constructed and cleverly concealed.

In many places there are wire entanglements and lengths of rabbit fencing both in the woods and in the open, carefully aligned so that they can be swept by rifle fire and machine guns, which are invisible from our side of the valley. The ground in front of the infantry trenches is also as a rule under cross fire from field artillery placed on neighbouring features and under high-angle fire from pieces placed well back behind woods on top of the plateau.

A feature of this action, as of the previous fights, is the use made by the enemy of their numerous heavy howitzers, with which they are able to direct a long-range fire all over the valley and right across it. Upon these they evidently place great reliance.

Where our men are holding the forward edges of the high ground on the north side they are now strongly entrenched. They are well fed, and in spite of the wet weather of the past week are cheerful and confident. The bombardment by both sides has been very heavy, and on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday was practically continuous.

Nevertheless, in spite of the general din caused by the reports of the immense number of heavy guns in action along our front on Wednesday, the arrival of a French force acting against the German right flank was at once announced on the east of our front some miles away by the continuous roar of their quick-firing artillery with which their attack was opened.

So far as the British are concerned the greater part of this week has been passed in bombardment, in gaining ground by degrees, and in beating back severe counter-attacks with heavy slaughter. Our casualties have been severe, but it is probable that those of the enemy are heavier. The rain has caused a great drop in temperature and there is more than a distinct feeling of autumn in the air, especially in the early mornings.

On our right and left the French have been fighting fiercely and have also been gradually gaining ground. One village has already during this battle been captured and recaptured twice by each side, and at the time of writing remains in the hands of the Germans. The fighting has been at close quarters and of the most desperate nature, and the streets of the village are filled with the dead of both sides. As an example of the spirit which is inspiring our Allies the following translation of the *Ordre du Jour* published on September 9 after the battle of Montmirail by the Commander of the French 5th Army is given—

Soldiers!

Upon the memorable fields of Montmirail, of Vauchamps, or Champauhert, which a century ago witnessed the victories of our ancestors over Blucher's Prussians, your vigorous offensive has triumphed over the resistance of the Germans. Held on his flanks, his centre broken, the enemy is now retreating towards East and North by forced marches. The most renowned Army Corps of Old Prussia, the contingents of Westphalia, of Hanover, or Brandenburg have retired in haste before you.

This first success is no more than a prelude. The enemy is shaken, but not yet decisively beaten.

You have still to undergo severe hardships, to make long marches, to fight hard battles.

May the image of our country, soiled by barbarians, always remain before your eyes. Never was it more necessary to sacrifice all for her.

Saluting the heroes who have fallen in the fighting of the last few days, my thoughts turn towards you—the victors in the next battle.

Forward, soldiers, for France!

Montmirail, September 9, 1914, General Commanding the 5th Army,

FRANCHET D'ESPEREY.

The Germans are a formidable enemy. Well trained, long prepared, and brave, their soldiers are carrying on the contest with skill and valour. Nevertheless they are fighting to win anyhow, regardless of all the rules of fair play, and there is evidence that they do not hesitate at anything in order to gain victory. A large number of the tales of their misbehaviour are exaggerations, and some of the stringent precautions they have taken to guard themselves against the inhabitants of the areas traversed are possibly justifiable measures of war. But at the same time it has been definitely established that they have committed atrocities on many occasions and they have been guilty of brutal conduct.

So many letters and statements of our own wounded soldiers have been published in our newspapers that the following epistle from a German soldier of the 74th Infantry Regiment (10th Corps) to his wife also may be of interest—

My dear Wife,

I have just been living through days that defy imagination. I should never have thought that men could stand it. Not a second has passed but my life has been in danger, and yet not a hair of my head has been hurt. It was horrible, it was ghastly. But I have been saved for you and for our happiness and I take heart again, although I am still terribly unnerved. God grant that I may see you again soon and that this horror may soon be over. None of us can do any more, human strength is at an end.

I will try to tell you about it—

On the 5th September the enemy were reported to be taking up a position near St. Prix (N.E. of Paris). The 10th Corps, which had made an astonishingly rapid advance, of course attacked on the Sunday.

Steep slopes led up to heights which were held in considerable force. With our weak detachments on the 74th and 91st Regiments we reached the crest and came under a terrible artillery fire that mowed us down. However, we

entered St. Prix. Hardly had we done so than we were met with shell fire and a violent fusillade from the enemy's infantry. Our Colonel was badly wounded—he is the third we have had. Fourteen men were killed round me.... We got away in a lull without being hit.

The 7th, 8th, and 9th of September we were constantly under shell and shrapnel fire and suffered terrible losses. I was in a house which was hit several times. The fear of a death of agony which is in every man's heart, and naturally so, is a terrible feeling.

How often I thought of you, my darling, and what I suffered in that terrifying battle which extended along a front of many miles near Montmirail, you cannot possibly imagine. Our heavy artillery was being used for the siege of Maubeuge; we wanted it badly, as the enemy had theirs in force and kept up a furious bombardment. For four days I was under artillery fire. It is like Hell, but a thousand times worse. On the night of the 9th the order was given to retreat, as it would have been madness to attempt to hold our position with our few men, and we should have risked a terrible defeat the next day. The 1st and 3rd Armies had not been able to attack with us, as we had advanced too rapidly.

Our moral was absolutely broken.

In spite of unheard-of sacrifices we had achieved nothing. I cannot understand how our Army, after fighting three great battles and being terribly weakened, was sent against a position which the enemy had prepared for three weeks; but naturally I know nothing of the intentions of our Chiefs.... They say nothing has been lost. In a word, we retired towards Cormontreuil and Reims by forced marches by day and night. We hear that three armies are going to get into line, entrench, rest, and then start afresh our victorious march on Paris. It was not a defeat, but only a strategic retreat. I have confidence in our Chiefs that everything will be successful. Our first battalion, which has fought with unparalleled bravery, is reduced from 1,200 to 194 men. These numbers speak for themselves....

Amongst minor happenings of interest are the following—

During a counter-attack by the German 53rd Regiment on portions of the Northampton and Queen's Regiments on Thursday, the 17th, a force of some 400 of the enemy were allowed to approach right up to the trench, occupied by a platoon of the former regiment, owing to the fact that they had held up their hands and made gestures that were interpreted as signs that they wished to surrender. When they were actually on the parapet of the trench held by the Northhamptons they opened fire on our men at point-blank range.

Unluckily for the enemy, however, flanking them and only some 400 yards away there happened to be a machine-gun manned by a detachment of the "Queen's." This at once opened fire, cutting a lane through their mass, and they fell back to their own trench with great loss. Shortly afterwards they were driven further back with additional loss by a battalion of the Guards which came up in support.

An incident which occurred some little time ago during our retirement is also worthy of record. On August 28, during the battle fought by the French along the Oise, between La Fère and Guise, one of the French Commanders desired to make an air reconnaissance. It was found, however, that no observers were available. Wishing to help our Allies as much as possible, the British officer attached to this particular French Army volunteered to go up with a pilot to observe.

He had never been in an aeroplane, but he made the ascent and produced a valuable reconnaissance report. Incidentally he had a duel in the air at an altitude of 6,000 ft. with the observer of a German Taube monoplane which approached. He fired several shots and drove off the hostile aeroplane. His action was much appreciated by the French.

In view of the many statements being made in the Press as to the use of Zeppelins against us, it is interesting to note that the Royal Flying Corps, who have been out on reconnaissances on every day since their arrival in France, have never seen a Zeppelin, though airships of a non-rigid type have been seen on two occasions. Near the Marne, late one evening, two such were observed over the German forces. Aeroplanes were despatched against them, but in the darkness our pilots were uncertain of the airships' nationality and did not attack. It was afterwards made clear that they could not have been French.

A week later, an officer reconnoitring to the flank saw an airship over the German forces and opposite the French. It had no distinguishing mark and was assumed to belong to the latter, though it is now known that it also must have been a German craft. The orders of the Royal Flying Corps are to attack Zeppelins at once, and there is some disappointment at the absence of those targets.

The enemy is still maintaining himself along the whole front; and in order to do so is throwing into the fight detachments composed of units from very different formations—the Active Army, the Reserve, and the Landwehr—as is shown by the uniforms of the prisoners recently captured. Our progress, although slow, on account of the strength of the defensive positions against which we are pressing, has in certain directions been continuous.

But the present battle may well last for some days more before a decision is reached, since, in truth, it now approximates somewhat to siege warfare. The Germans are making use of searchlights, and this fact, coupled with their great strength in heavy artillery, leads to the supposition that they are employing material which may have been collected for the siege of Paris.

The nature of the general situation after the operations of the 18th, the 19th, and the 20th of September cannot better be summarized than as expressed by a neighbouring French Commander to his Corps—

Having repulsed repeated and violent counterattacks made by the enemy... we have the feeling that we have been victorious.

So far as the British are concerned, the course of events during these three days can be described in a few words. During Friday, September 18, artillery fire was kept up intermittently by both sides during daylight. At night the Germans counter-attacked certain portions of our line, supporting the advance of their infantry, as always, by heavy bombardment; but the strokes were not delivered with any great vigour and ceased about 2 a.m.

During the day's fighting an anti-aircraft gun of the 3rd Army Corps succeeded in bringing down a German aeroplane. News was received also that a body of French cavalry had demolished part of the railway to the north, so cutting—at least temporarily—one line of communication which is of particular importance to the enemy.

On Saturday, the 19th, the bombardment was resumed by the Germans at an early hour, and continued intermittently under reply from our own guns. Some of their infantry advanced from cover, apparently with the intention of attacking, but on coming under fire they retired. Otherwise the day was uneventful except for the activity of the artillery, which is now a matter of normal routine rather than an event. Another hostile aeroplane was brought down by us; and one of our airmen succeeded in dropping several bombs over the German lines, one incendiary bomb falling with considerable effect on a transport park near La Fère.

A buried store of the enemy's munitions of war was also found not far from the Aisne, ten wagon-loads of live shell and two wagons of cable being dug up; and traces were discovered of large quantities of stores having been burnt, all tending to show that so far back as the Aisne the German retirement was hurried. There was a strong wind during the day, accompanied by driving rain, and this militated against aerial reconnaissance.

On Sunday, the 20th, nothing of importance occurred until the afternoon, when there was a break in the clouds and an interval of feeble sunshine, which, however, was hardly powerful enough to warm the soaking troops.

The Germans took advantage of this brief spell of fine weather to make several separate counter-attacks against different points. These were all repulsed with loss to the enemy; but the casualties incurred by us were by no means light.

In one section of our firing line the occupants of the trenches were under the impression that they heard a military band in the enemy's lines just before the attack developed. It is now known that the German infantry started their advance with bands playing. The offensive against one or two points was renewed at dusk with no greater success.

The brunt of the resistance has naturally fallen upon the infantry. In spite of the fact that they have been drenched to the skin for some days and their trenches have been deep in mud and water, and in spite of incessant night alarms and of the almost continuous bombardment to which they have been subjected, they have on every occasion been ready for the enemy's infantry when the latter have attempted to assault, and they have beaten them back with great loss. Indeed, the sight of the Pickelhauben coming up has been a positive relief after the long trying hours of inaction under shell fire.

The object of the great proportion of artillery the Germans employ is to beat down the resistance of their enemy by a concentrated and prolonged fire and to shatter their nerve with high explosives before the infantry attack is launched. They seem to have relied on doing this with us; but they have not done so, though it has taken them several costly experiments to discover this fact.

From the statements of prisoners, indeed, it appears that they have been greatly disappointed by the moral effect produced by their heavy guns, which, despite the actual losses inflicted, has not been at all commensurate with the colossal expenditure of ammunition, which has really been wasted.

By this it is not implied that their artillery fire is not good. It is more than good; it is excellent. But the British soldier is a difficult person to impress or depress, even by immense shells filled with high explosives which detonate with terrific violence and form craters large enough to act as graves for five horses. The German howitzer shells are eight to nine inches in calibre, and on impact they send up columns of greasy black smoke. On account of this they are irreverently dubbed "Coal-boxes," "Black Marias," or "Jack Johnsons" by the soldiers.

Men who take things in this spirit are, it seems, likely to throw out the calculations based on loss of moral so carefully framed by the German military philosophers.

A considerable amount of information about the enemy has by now been gleaned from prisoners. It has been gathered that our bombardment on the

15th produced a great impression. The opinion is also recorded that our infantry make such good use of the ground that the German companies are decimated by our rifle fire before a British soldier can be seen.

From an official diary captured by the 1st Army Corps it appears that one of the German Corps contains an extraordinary mixture of units. If the composition of the other corps is at all similar it may be assumed that the present efficiency of the enemy's forces is in no way comparable with what it was when war commenced.

The losses in officers are noted as having been especially severe. A brigade is stated to be commanded by a major, and some companies of the Foot Guards to be commanded by one-year volunteers, while after the battle of Montmirail one regiment lost fifty-five out of sixty officers.

The prisoners recently captured appreciate the act that the march on Paris has failed and that their forces are retreating, but state that the object of this movement is explained by the officers as being to withdraw into closer touch with supports which have stayed too far in rear.

The officers are also endeavouring to encourage the troops by telling them that they will be at home by Christmas. A large number of the men, however, believe that they are beaten. The following is an extract from one document—

With the English troops we have great difficulties. They have a queer way of causing losses to the enemy. They make good trenches, in which they wait patiently. They carefully measure the ranges for their rifle fire, and they then open a truly hellish fire on the unsuspecting cavalry. This was the reason that we had such heavy losses.... According to our officers, the English striking forces are exhausted. The English people never really wanted war.

From another source—

The English are very brave and fight to the last man.... One of our companies has lost 130 men out of 240.

The following letter, which refers to the fighting on the Aisne, has been printed and circulated to the troops—

Letter found on a German Officer of the 7th Reserve Corps.

Cerny, S. of Loon, 17/9/14

My dear parents, ... Our Corps has the task of holding the heights south of Cerny in all circumstances till, the 15th Corps on our left flank can grip the enemy's flank. On our right are other corps. We are fighting with the English Guards, Highlanders, and Zouaves. The losses on both sides have been enormous. For the most part this is due to the too brilliant French artillery. The English are marvellously trained in making use of the ground. One

never sees them, and one is constantly under fire. The French airmen perform wonderful feats. We cannot get rid of them. As soon as an airman has flown over us, ten minutes later we get their shrapnel fire in our position. We have little artillery in our corps; without it we cannot get forward.

Three days ago our division took possession of these heights, dug itself in, etc. Two days ago, early in the morning, we were attacked by immensely superior English forces (one brigade and two battalions), and were turned out of our positions; the fellows took five guns from us. It was a tremendous hand-to-hand fight. How I escaped myself I am not clear. I then had to bring up supports on foot (my horse was wounded, and the others were too far in rear). Then came up the Guard Jäger Battalion, 4th Jäger, 65th Regiment, Reserve Regiment 13, Landwehr Regiments 13 and 16, and, with the help of the artillery, drove back the fellows out of the position again.

Our machine-guns did excellent work. The English fell in heaps.

In our battalion three Iron Crosses have been given, one to the C.O., one to the Captain, one to the Surgeon. Let us hope that we shall be the lucky ones next time.... During the first two days of the battle I had only one piece of bread and no water, spent the night in the rain without my greatcoat. The rest of my kit was on the horses, which have been left miles behind with the baggage (which cannot come up into the battle), because as soon as you put your nose out from behind cover the bullets whistle. The war is terrible. We are all hoping that the decisive battle will end the war, as our troops have already got round Paris.

If we first beat the English, the French resistance will soon be broken. Russia will be very quickly dealt with, of this there is no doubt. We received splendid help from the Austrian heavy artillery at Maubeuge. They bombarded Fort Cerfontaine in such a way that there was not ten metres of parapet which did not show enormous craters made by shells. The armoured turrets were found upside down.

Yesterday evening about 6 p.m., in the valley in which our reserves stood, there was such a terrible cannonade that we saw nothing of the sky but a cloud of smoke. We had few casualties.

Amongst items of news are the following. Recently a pilot and observer of the Royal Flying Corps were forced by a breakage in the aeroplane to descend in the enemy's lines. The pilot managed to "pancake" his machine down to earth, and the two escaped into some thick undergrowth in a wood. The enemy came up and seized the smashed machine, but did not search for our men with much zeal. The latter lay hid till dark and then found their way to the Aisne, across which they swam, reaching camp in safety but barefooted.

Numerous floating bridges have by now been thrown across the Aisne, and some permanent bridges repaired, under fire. On the 20th a lieutenant of the 3rd Signal Company, Royal Engineers, was unfortunately drowned whilst attempting to swim across the river with a cable in order to open up fresh telegraph communication on the north side.

Espionage is still carried on by the enemy to a considerable extent. Recently the suspicions of some French troops were aroused by coming across a farm from which the horses had not been removed. After some search they discovered a telephone which was connected by an underground cable with the German lines; and the owner of the farm paid the penalty usual in war for his treachery.

After some cases of village fighting which occurred earlier in the war it was reported by some of our officers that the Germans had attempted to approach to close quarters by forcing prisoners to march in front of them. The Germans have recently repeated the same trick on a larger scale against the French, as is shown by the copy of the order printed below. It is therein referred to as a "ruse"; but if that term be accepted, it is distinctly an illegal ruse.

— Army — September, 1914.

General Staff.

3rd Bureau.

No.

During a recent night attack the Germans drove a column of French prisoners in front of them.

This action is to be brought to the notice of all our troops—

1. In order to put them on their guard against such a dastardly ruse.
2. In order that every soldier may know how the Germans treat their prisoners. Our troops must not forget that if they allow themselves to be taken prisoners the Germans will not fail to expose them to French bullets.

(Signature of Commander.)

Further evidence has now been collected of the misuse of the white flag and other signs of surrender during the action on the 17th, when owing to this one officer was shot. During the recent fighting also some German ambulance wagons advanced in order to collect the wounded. An order to cease fire was consequently given to our guns which were firing on this particular section of ground. The German battery commanders at once took advantage of the lull in the action to climb up their observation ladders and on to a haystack to locate our guns, which soon afterwards came under a

far more accurate fire than any to which they had been subjected up to that time.

A British officer who was captured by the Germans and has since escaped reports that while a prisoner he saw men who had been fighting subsequently put on Red Cross brassards. That the irregular use of the protection afforded by the Geneva Convention is not uncommon is confirmed by the fact that on one occasion men in the uniform of combatant units have been captured wearing the Red Cross brassard hastily slipped over the arm. The excuse given has been that they had been detailed after a fight to look after the wounded. It is reported by a cavalry officer that the driver of a motor-car with a machine-gun mounted on it, which he captured, was wearing the Red Cross.

Approximate position of the Allies and the German forces at the great battle of the Aisne.

Full details of the actual damage done to the Cathedral at Reims will doubtless have been cabled home, so that no description of it is necessary. The Germans bombarded the Cathedral twice with their heavy artillery.

One reason why it caught alight so quickly was that on one side of it was some scaffolding which had been erected for restoration work. Straw had also been laid on the floor for the reception of German wounded. It is to the credit of the French that practically all the German wounded were successfully extricated from the burning building. There was no justification on military grounds for this act of vandalism, which seems to have been caused by the exasperation born of failure, a sign of impotence rather than of strength.

It is noteworthy that a well-known hotel not far from the Cathedral, which was kept by a German, was not touched.

By the Editor

I have attempted in the following account to give a word-picture of street fighting. I have been at pains to collect from various sources the incidents I have described, and the little story, whilst it is not given as an actual occurrence, describes faithfully if sketchily an event repeated a score of times along the allied line.

It is such a line as you can only imagine made up of river and forest, of tree-clad rolling hills, of white patches of quarry, of strange little towns smoking sulkily.

Well may they be sullen, roofless walls and whitely dusty half-towers, for the dead lie in indescribable attitudes in the streets—stark grey-faced men staring up to the sky with eyes that see not.

French and German lie here—the British coat did not get so far east. His dead is laid in orderly fashion under neat mounds of earth with forage caps atop and little inscriptions written hastily upon the crosses which comradeship has set up to mark the place of their lonely sleep. These fussy British put away their dead quickly, for the dead are awful and solemn to see, and we must go into battle with Tipperary on our lips or the men lose their phlegmatic quality which is half their asset.

But here blue coat has been in close touch with grey—rusty bayonets stick out of men's chests and the stabber himself lies a few paces away, legs outstretched, shrunken hands, and cold blue fingers still gripping an invisible rifle. The Germans came into their town, looted it and went on their way. Then French cavalry came cautiously and rode its horses through side streets, then came blue coat infantry, marching stolidly and humming a boulevard tune, then the guns—very business-like—and they all disappeared at the far end of the village, over a grey little bridge. So the village remained untenanted save for stray cats. I call it village though they speak proudly of "la ville"—at least they spoke in the days when there was occasion for pride.

You may picture this village on a hot day in September set in the fold of the hills to the right of Soissons looking northward. Near by the Aisne moves peaceably through meadows, skirting dark green woods, with here and there a moored barge testifying to its commercial value.

The town is made up of long streets connected by crooked side thoroughfares. The two centre streets are the market and the business streets, and in the very centre of the town is a hoary old church, where generations of the townsfolk have worshipped. It looks for all the world like an ancient fortress with its thick walls and smooth buttresses.

Market street is closed and silent. Some of the doors have been wrenched from their hinges, and the stock lies in confusion in the darkened interior. A few windows have been smashed, but in the main the town has been uninjured.

This is the town of X, deserted of citizens, that the last rearguard of French infantry leaves behind.

There are guns going soon ... distant "bom-bom!" of artillery, rattling growls of musketry. You see nothing, only the placid countryside and a suggestion of movement on the white road over the hill to the north. Then the guns grow louder and more insistent, a puff of smoke over the ridge, another and another. Shrapnel—and at a knowing range. Now the blue coats are coming back but in no hurry. You see them from the edge of the village in a ragged line, slowly, slowly, moving from cover to cover. Haystack, farm building,

barn, house wall, heap of stones—anything which offers protection for the body and rest for the rifle.

But if the infantry move reluctantly, the guns are coming back at full speed. Down the hill at breakneck speed, whips cracking, wheels skidding, limber and gun swaying from one side of the road to the other, a tearing mad rush, that brings them through the main street and out the other side before you realize that it is coming. And there is reason for hustle. Overhead like a clap of thunder a great shell bursts and shrapnel scatters down to the paved streets. Again and again and yet again, not a second interval between the shells.

"Smash!"

The belfry of the old church has been struck and massive and shapeless blocks of stone begin to fall with curious deliberation, as though each great morsel was choosing the place where it would lie.

"Bang—whurr!"

Like the sound of an express train moving through an enclosed station the whole wall of the church comes rumbling to earth.

Blue coats are in the streets now, swinging through and scarcely raising eyes to see the havoc the enemy's shells are wreaking. Tramp, tramp, tramp—they are gone. Then more blue coats, but these are alert and watchful. They face about at the end of the village street, draw a handy wagon across the road, pile all manner of obstacles and, crouching low behind, open fire at the grey coats which have appeared on the road outside the village. Then a machine gun comes into action.

Grey coat has a gun in position on the hill ... two shots wreck the wagon and send blue coats scampering up the street. Here they stand again, fighting, firing desperately.

Grey coat has reached the northern end. He comes in solid rank humming a guttural song about his Fatherland. And now from one end of the street to the other swift messages of death are exchanged, the street is filled with whistling noises and the sobs of stricken men. The clean cobble stones are all mottled with blood and littered with sprawling shapes. In the midst of the firing comes a great savage cry. Blue coat is racing down the street with needle-pointed bayonet outstretched. Men go down swiftly, but the rest come on with that scream of hate and rage....

Only for a brief moment are they locked together in a terribly fierce embrace of death ... grey coat breaks and runs with the French at his heels—more and more blue coats come up and out through the northern end of the

street—they reel, stabbing, shooting, smashing with butt end and barrel till the street is clear again.

Clear, save for little heaps of men who have died and little pitiable units who drag their painful limbs to the open doors of the looted shops to find sanctuary and quiet therein. But the village is on fire. Big billows of choking smoke come rolling down the street. There is a fierce splutter and crackle, and the wounded must clear out the best way they can. The official report says:

"The village of X was taken and retaken many times."

And these fierce encounters, these hateful and deadly struggles are peculiar to no part of the line. From Belfort to Soissons it goes on all day and all the night; every day and every night. It is a monstrous and heroic thing. As bloody in its incidence as the most fearful hand-to-hand fighting of the Crusades.

On the left where the yellow coats are you may sometimes see the same, but in the main the English line is all for rifle fire. It is a terrifying fire, because it comes from nowhere. Blue coat knows where his enemy is, because he can see his shrapnel raking the trenches, but of yellow coat he sees nothing. Yellow coat is a cunning fighter. Yellow coat hides behind things—they say he can cover himself with a blade of grass. "He works the ground most wonderfully," says one report—and that an officer of the enemy.

He fights in his own peculiar way. It is a way they taught him in South Africa, in India. He learnt bits of it at Chitral, and bits at Modder River, and not a few tips he picked up on the Fox Hills, near Aldershot. He only knows one method of fighting, but he is willing to learn. Only he complains that the German has taught him nothing save the use to which a white flag may be put.

His mind is equally divided at all times between two most important matters—the destruction of his enemy and his own comfort. If anything has to give place it is the question of comfort. He has tremendous reserves of energy, and spends his time between repulsing the mad rushes of his enemy, in arguing with some bitterness as to the exact range of the enemy's position.

Not that it makes any difference to him, because all his shooting is down at 500 yards—which is point blank.

He grouses most when he is safest—in danger he is wonderfully cheerful, with a penchant for sentimental songs. His shooting is wonderful—he never misses his man and he never fires until he sees his man. If he does his section commander whispers insulting nothings into his red ear.

Yellow coat thinks that he himself will take a bit of beating and he is confident that his officer is one of the most wonderful creations that mankind has ever witnessed.

His officer returns the compliment and swears that Private Yellow Coat is a sealed pattern of all that a soldier should be. In every battalion is a French officer—an excellent idea, for Mr. Yellow Coat is very keen in showing the Frenchman what an excellent fellow he (Yellow Coat) is. There is swank in it, of course—but the right kind of swank. The soldiers of the King fight all the better because of that critical eye.

Yellow coat does his bayoneting too—swiftly and with little noise. He has no great respect for grey coat as a bayonet fighter, believe me. He only respects him because grey coat is very brave in a dull, sheep-like way, and comes without fear in close formation to be butchered by the little rifles that make no smoke and are fired from God knows where.

GENERAL FRENCH'S TRIBUTE TO THE ARMY

The following special order of the day by Sir John French pays eloquent tribute to the devotion of the British Army in the severe fighting which has been described.

SPECIAL ORDER OF THE DAY

By Field-Marshal Sir John French, G.C.B., G.C.V.O., K.C.M.G.,
Commander-in-Chief, British Army in the Field.

September 17, 1914.

Once more I have to express my deep appreciation of the splendid behaviour of officers, noncommissioned officers, and men of the Army under my command throughout the great Battle of the Aisne, which has been in progress since the evening of the 12th inst. The Battle of the Marne, which lasted from the morning of the 6th to the evening of the 10th, had hardly ended in the precipitate flight of the enemy when we were brought face to face with a position of extraordinary strength, carefully entrenched and prepared for defence by an Army and a Staff which are thorough adepts in such work.

Throughout the 13th and 14th that position was most gallantly attacked by the British Forces, and the passage of the Aisne effected. This is the third day the troops have been gallantly holding the position they have gained against the most desperate counter-attacks and a hail of heavy artillery.

I am unable to find adequate words in which to express the admiration I feel for their magnificent conduct.

The French Armies on our right and left are making good progress, and I feel sure that we have only to hold on with tenacity to the ground we have won

for a very short time longer, when the Allies will be again in full pursuit of a beaten enemy.

The self-sacrificing devotion and splendid spirit of the British Army in France will carry all before it.

(Sd.) J.D.P. French, Field-Marshal.

Commanding-in-Chief, the British Army in the Field.

APPENDIX A

The sullen cloud that hung over Britain was almost at breaking-point when Sir Edward Grey, on August 3, 1914, gave to the House of Commons his memorable presentation of the position of Great Britain at the outbreak of the war. The main points of his speech are here given.

IT is clear that the peace of Europe cannot be preserved. Russia and Germany, at any rate, have declared war upon each other.

We have consistently worked with a single mind, with all the earnestness in our power, to preserve peace. The House may be satisfied on that point.

In the present crisis, it has not been possible to secure the peace of Europe; because there has been little time, and there has been a disposition—at any rate in some quarters on which I will not dwell—to force things rapidly to an issue, at any rate to the great risk of peace, and, as we now know, the result of that is that the policy of peace as far as the Great Powers generally are concerned is in danger.

I do not want to dwell on that, and to comment on it, and to say where the blame seems to us to lie, which Powers were most in favour of peace, which were most disposed to risk or endanger peace, because I would like the House to approach this crisis in which we are now from the point of view of British interests, British honour, and British obligations, free from all passion as to why peace has not been preserved.

The present crisis has originated in a dispute between Austria and Servia. I can say this with the most absolute confidence—no Government and no country has less desire to be involved in war over a dispute with Austria and Servia than the Government and the country of France. They are involved in it because of their obligation of honour under a definite alliance with Russia. We are not parties to the Franco-Russian Alliance. We do not even know the terms of that alliance.

I come to what we think the situation requires of us. For many years we have had a long-standing friendship with France. I remember well the feeling in the House—and my own feeling—for I spoke on the subject, I think, when the late Government made their agreement with France—the warm and cordial feeling resulting from the fact that these two nations, who had had perpetual differences in the past, had cleared these differences away; I remember saying, I think, that it seemed to me that some benign influence had been at work to produce the cordial atmosphere that had made that possible.

But how far that friendship entails obligation—it has been a friendship between the nations and ratified by the nations—how far that entails an obligation, let every man look into his own heart, and his own feelings, and

construe the extent of the obligation for himself. I construe it myself as I feel it, but I do not wish to urge upon any one else more than their feelings dictate as to what they should feel about the obligation. The House, individually and collectively, may judge for itself. I speak my personal view, and I have given the House my own feeling in the matter.

The French fleet is now in the Mediterranean, and the northern and western coasts of France are absolutely undefended.

The French coasts are absolutely undefended. My own feeling is that if a foreign fleet, engaged in a war which France had not sought, and in which she had not been the aggressor, came down the English Channel and bombarded and battered the undefended coasts of France, we could not stand aside, and see this going on practically within sight of our eyes, with our arms folded, looking on dispassionately, doing nothing.

I believe that would be the feeling of this country.

But I want to look at the matter without sentiment, and from the point of view of British interests, and it is on that that I am going to base and justify what I am presently going to say to the House.

If we say nothing at this moment, what is France to do with her fleet in the Mediterranean? If she leaves it there, with no statement from us as to what we will do, she leaves her northern and western coasts absolutely undefended, at the mercy of a German fleet coming down the Channel to do as it pleases in a war which is a war of life and death between them. If we say nothing, it may be that the French fleet is withdrawn from the Mediterranean.

We are in the presence of a European conflagration; can anybody set limits to the consequences that may arise out of it?

Let us assume that to-day we stand aside in an attitude of neutrality, saying, "No, we cannot undertake and engage to help either party in this conflict." Let us suppose the French fleet is withdrawn from the Mediterranean; and let us assume that the consequences—which are already tremendous in what has happened in Europe even to countries which are at peace—in fact, equally whether countries are at peace or at war—let us assume that out of that come consequences unforeseen, which make it necessary at a sudden moment that, in defence of vital British interests, we should go to war.

What will be our position then? We have not kept a fleet in the Mediterranean which is equal to dealing alone with a combination of other fleets in the Mediterranean. It would be the very moment when we could not detach more ships to the Mediterranean, and we might have exposed this

country from our negative attitude at the present moment to the most appalling risk.

I say that from the point of view of British interests. We feel strongly that France was entitled to know—and to know at once—whether or not in the event of attack upon her unprotected northern and western coasts she could depend upon British support. In that emergency, and in these compelling circumstances, yesterday afternoon I gave to the French Ambassador the following statement—

"I am authorized to give an assurance that if the German fleet comes into the Channel or through the North Sea to undertake hostile operations against the French coasts or shipping, the British fleet will give all the protection in its power. This assurance is, of course, subject to the policy of His Majesty's Government receiving the support of Parliament, and must not be taken as binding His Majesty's Government to take any action until the above contingency of action by the German fleet takes place."

I read that to the House, not as a declaration of war on our part, not as entailing immediate aggressive action on our part, but as binding us to take aggressive action should that contingency arise.

Things move very hurriedly from hour to hour.

Fresh news comes in, and I cannot give this in any very formal way; but I understand that the German Government would be prepared, if we would pledge ourselves to neutrality, to agree that its fleet would not attack the northern coast of France.

I have only heard that shortly before I came to the House, but it is far too narrow an engagement for us.

And there is the more serious consideration—becoming more serious every hour—there is the question of the neutrality of Belgium.

The governing factor of our position with Belgium is the treaty of 1839, but this is a treaty with a history—a history accumulated since. In 1870, when there was war between France and Germany, the question of the neutrality of Belgium arose, and various things were said. Amongst other things, Prince Bismarck gave an assurance to Belgium that—confirming his verbal assurance, he gave in writing a declaration which he said was superfluous in reference to the treaty in existence—that the German Confederation and its allies would respect the neutrality of Belgium, it being always understood that that neutrality would be respected by the other belligerent Powers. That is valuable as a recognition in 1870 on the part of Germany of the sacredness of these treaty rights.

The treaty is an old treaty—1839—and that was the view taken of it in 1870. It is one of those treaties which are founded, not only on consideration for Belgium, which benefits under the treaty, but in the interests of those who guarantee the neutrality of Belgium.

When mobilization was beginning, I knew that this question must be a most important element in our policy. I telegraphed at the same time in similar terms to both Paris and Berlin to say that it was essential for us to know whether the French and German Governments respectively were prepared to undertake an engagement to respect the neutrality of Belgium. These are the replies. I got from the French Government this reply—

"The French Government are resolved to respect the neutrality of Belgium, and it would only be in the event of some other Power violating that neutrality that France might find herself under the necessity, in order to assure the defence of her security, to act otherwise. This assurance has been given several times. The President of the Republic spoke of it to the King of the Belgians, and the French Minister at Brussels has spontaneously renewed the assurance to the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs to-day."

From the German Government the reply was—

"The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs could not possibly give an answer before consulting the Emperor and the Imperial Chancellor."

Sir Edward Goschen, to whom I had said it was important to have an answer soon, said he hoped the answer would not be too long delayed. The German Minister for Foreign Affairs then gave Sir Edward Goschen to understand that he rather doubted whether they could answer at all, as any reply they might give could not fail, in the event of war, to have the undesirable effect of disclosing, to a certain extent, part of their plan of campaign.

We were sounded in the course of last week as to whether, if a guarantee were given that, after the war, Belgian integrity would be preserved, that would content us. We replied that we could not bargain away whatever interests or obligations we had in Belgian neutrality.

Diplomatic intervention took place last week on our part. What can diplomatic intervention do now?

We have great and vital interests in the independence—and integrity is the least part—of Belgium.

If the independence of Belgium goes, the independence of Holland will follow.

I ask the House from the point of view of British interests, to consider what may be at stake. If France is beaten in a struggle of life and death, beaten to her knees, loses her position as a great Power, becomes subordinate to the will and power of one greater than herself—consequences which I do not anticipate, because I am sure that France has the power to defend herself with all the energy and ability and patriotism which she has shown so often—still, if that were to happen, and if Belgium fell under the same dominating influence, and then Holland, and then Denmark, then would not Mr. Gladstone's words come true, that just opposite to us there would be a common interest against the unmeasured aggrandisement of any Power?

It may be said, I suppose, that we might stand aside, husband our strength, and that, whatever happened in the course of this war, at the end of it intervene with effect to put things right, and to adjust them to our point of view.

If, in a crisis like this, we run away from those obligations of honour and interest as regards the Belgian treaty, I doubt whether, whatever material force we might have at the end, it would be of very much value in face of the respect that we should have lost.

We are going to suffer, I am afraid, terribly in this war, whether we are in it or whether we stand aside.

I do not believe for a moment, that at the end of this war, even if we stood aside and remained aside, we should be in a position, a material position, to use our force decisively to undo what had happened in the course of the war, to prevent the whole of the West of Europe opposite to us—if that had been the result of the war—falling under the domination of a single Power, and I am quite sure that our moral position would be such as to have lost us all respect.

I have read to the House the only engagements that we have yet taken definitely with regard to the use of force. I think it is due to the House to say that we have taken no engagement yet with regard to sending an expeditionary armed force out of the country.

Mobilization of the fleet has taken place; mobilization of the army is taking place; but we have as yet taken no engagement, because I feel that—in the case of a European conflagration such as this, unprecedented, with our enormous responsibilities in India and other parts of the Empire, or in countries in British occupation, with all the unknown factors—we must take very carefully into consideration the use which we make of sending an expeditionary force out of the country until we know how we stand.

I have told the House how far we have at present gone in commitments and the conditions which influence our policy, and I have put to the House and dwelt at length upon how vital is the condition of the neutrality of Belgium.

What other policy is there before the House?

There is but one way in which the Government could make certain at the present moment of keeping outside this war, and that would be that it should immediately issue a proclamation of unconditional neutrality.

We cannot do that. We have made the commitment to France that I have read to the House which prevents us doing that. We have got the consideration of Belgium which prevents us also from any unconditional neutrality, and, without these conditions absolutely satisfied and satisfactory, we are bound not to shrink from proceeding to the use of all the forces in our power.

If we did take that line by saying, "We will have nothing whatever to do with this matter" under no conditions—the Belgian treaty obligations, the possible position in the Mediterranean, with damage to British interests, and what may happen to France from our failure to support France—if we were to say that all those things mattered nothing, were as nothing, and to say we would stand aside, we should, I believe, sacrifice our respect and good name and reputation before the world, and should not escape the most serious and grave economic consequences.

I do not for a moment conceal, after what I have said, and after the information, incomplete as it is, that I have given to the House with regard to Belgium, that we must be prepared, and we are prepared, for the consequences of having to use all the strength we have at any moment—we know not how soon—to defend ourselves and to take our part.

As far as the forces of the Crown are concerned, we are ready. I believe the Prime Minister and my right hon. friend the First Lord of the Admiralty have no doubt whatever that the readiness and the efficiency of those forces were never at a higher mark than they are to-day, and never was there a time when confidence was more justified in the power of the navy to protect our commerce and to protect our shores.

We worked for peace up to the last moment, and beyond the last moment. How hard, how persistently, and how earnestly we strove for peace last week the House will see from the papers that will be before it.

But that is over, as far as the peace of Europe is concerned. We are now face to face with a situation and all the consequences which it may yet have to unfold.

I have put the vital facts before the House, and if, as seems not improbable, we are forced, and rapidly forced, to take our stand upon those issues, then I believe, when the country realizes what is at stake, what the real issues are, the magnitude of the impending dangers in the West of Europe, which I have endeavoured to describe to the House, we shall be supported throughout, not only by the House of Commons, but by the determination, the resolution, the courage and the endurance of the whole country.

APPENDIX B

Statement by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons, August 6, 1914.

MOTION made, and Question proposed, "That a sum, not exceeding £100,000,000, be granted to His Majesty, beyond the ordinary grants of Parliament, towards defraying expenses that may be incurred during the year ending March 31st, 1915, for all measures which may be taken for the security of the country, for the conduct of Naval and Military operations, for assisting the food supply, for promoting the continuance of trade, industry, and business communications, whether by means of insurance or indemnity against risk, or otherwise for the relief of distress, and generally for all expenses arising out of the existence of a state of war."

The Prime Minister (Mr. Asquith).—In asking the House to agree to the resolution which Mr. Speaker has just read from the Chair, I do not propose, because I do not think it is in any way necessary, to traverse the ground again which was covered by my right hon. friend the Foreign Secretary two or three nights ago. He stated—and I do not think any of the statements he made are capable of answer and certainly have not yet been answered—the grounds upon which, with the utmost reluctance and with infinite regret, His Majesty's Government have been compelled to put this country in a state of war with what, for many years and indeed generations past, has been a friendly Power. But, Sir, the papers which have since been presented to Parliament, and which are now in the hands of hon. Members will, I think, show how strenuous, how unremitting, how persistent, even when the last glimmer of hope seemed to have faded away, were the efforts of my right hon. friend to secure for Europe an honourable and a lasting peace. Every one knows, in the great crisis which occurred last year in the East of Europe, it was largely, if not mainly, by the acknowledgment of all Europe, due to the steps taken by my right hon. friend that the area of the conflict was limited, and that, so far as the great Powers are concerned, peace was maintained.

If his efforts upon this occasion have, unhappily, been less successful, I am certain that this House and the country, and I will add posterity and history, will accord to him what is, after all, the best tribute that can be paid to any statesman: that, never derogating for an instant or by an inch from the honour and interests of his own country, he has striven, as few men have striven, to maintain and preserve the greatest interest of all countries—universal peace.

The papers which are now in the hands of hon. Members show something more than that. They show what were the terms which were offered to us in exchange for our neutrality. I trust that not only the Members of this House, but all our fellow-subjects everywhere will read the communications, will

read, learn and mark the communications which passed only a week ago to-day between Berlin and London in this matter.

The terms by which it was sought to buy our neutrality are contained in the communication made by the German Chancellor to Sir Edward Goschen.

I think I must refer to them for a moment. After referring to the state of things as between Austria and Russia, Sir Edward Goschen goes on:—

"He then proceeded to make the following strong bid for British neutrality. He said that it was clear, so far as he was able to judge the main principle which governed British policy, that Great Britain would never stand by and allow France to be crushed in any conflict there might be. That, however, was not the object at which Germany aimed. Provided that neutrality of Great Britain were certain, every assurance would be given to the British Government that the Imperial Government"—Let the House observe these words—"aimed at no territorial acquisition at the expense of France should they prove victorious in any war that might ensue."

Sir Edward Goschen proceeded to put a very pertinent question:—

"I questioned His Excellency about the French colonies"—What are the French colonies? They mean every part of the dominions and possessions of France outside the geographical area of Europe—"and he said that he was unable to give a similar undertaking in that respect."

Let me come to what, in my mind, personally, has always been the crucial, and almost the governing consideration, namely, the position of the small states:—

"As regards Holland, however, His Excellency said that so long as Germany's adversaries respected the integrity and neutrality of the Netherlands, Germany was ready to give His Majesty's Government an assurance that she would do likewise."

Then we come to Belgium:—

"It depended upon the action of France what operations Germany might be forced to enter upon in Belgium, but, when the war was over, Belgian integrity would be respected if she had not sided against Germany."

Let the House observe the distinction between those two cases. In regard to Holland it was not only independence and integrity but also neutrality; but in regard to Belgium there was no mention of neutrality at all, nothing but an assurance that after the war came to an end the integrity of Belgium would be respected. Then His Excellency added:—

"Ever since he had been Chancellor the object of his policy had been to bring about an understanding with England. He trusted that these assurances"—

the assurances I have read out to the House—"might form the basis of that understanding which he so much desired."

What does that amount to? Let me just ask the House. I do so, not with the object of inflaming passion, certainly not with the object of exciting feeling against Germany, but I do so to vindicate and make clear the position of the British Government in this matter. What did that proposal amount to? In the first place, it meant this: That behind the back of France—they were not made a party to these communications—we should have given, if we had assented to that, a free licence to Germany to annex, in the event of a successful war, the whole of the extra-European dominions and possessions of France.

What did it mean as regards Belgium? When she addressed, as she has addressed in these last few days, her moving appeal to us to fulfil our solemn guarantee of her neutrality, what reply should we have given? What reply should we have given to that Belgian appeal? We should have been obliged to say that, without her knowledge, we had bartered away to the Power threatening her our obligation to keep our plighted word.

Belgians are fighting and losing their lives. What would have been the position of Great Britain to-day in the face of that spectacle, if we had assented to this infamous proposal? Yes, and what are we to get in return for the betrayal of our friends and the dishonour of our obligations? What are we to get in return? A promise—nothing more; a promise as to what Germany would do in certain eventualities; a promise, be it observed—I am sorry to have to say it, but it must be put upon record—given by a Power which was at that very moment announcing its intention to violate its own treaty and inviting us to do the same. I can only say, if we had dallied or temporized, we, as a Government, should have covered ourselves with dishonour, and we should have betrayed the interests of this country, of which we are trustees. I am glad, and I think the country will be glad, to turn to the reply which my right hon. friend made, and of which I will read to the House two of the more salient passages. Sir Edward Grey said—

"His Majesty's Government cannot for a moment entertain the Chancellor's proposal that they should bind themselves to neutrality on such terms. What he asks us in effect is to engage to stand by while French Colonies are taken if France is beaten, so long as Germany does not take French territory as distinct from the Colonies. From the material point of view"—My right hon. friend, as he always does, used very temperate language—"such a proposal is unacceptable, for France, without further territory in Europe being taken from her, could be so crushed as to lose her position as a Great Power, and become subordinate to German policy."

That is the material aspect. But he proceeded—

"Altogether, apart from that, it would be a disgrace for us to make this bargain with Germany at the expense of France, a disgrace from which the good name of this country would never recover. The Chancellor also in effect asks us to bargain away whatever obligation or interest we have as regards the neutrality of Belgium. We could not entertain that bargain either."

He then says—

"We must preserve our full freedom to act, as circumstances may seem to us to require."

And he added, I think, in sentences which the House will appreciate—

"You should ... add most earnestly that the one way of maintaining the good relations between England and Germany is that they should continue to work together to preserve the peace of Europe.... For that object this Government will work in that way with all sincerity and good will.

"If the peace of Europe can be preserved and the present crisis safely passed, my own endeavour will be to promote some arrangement to which Germany could be a party, by which she could be assured that no aggressive or hostile policy would be pursued against her or her allies by France, Russia, and ourselves, jointly or separately. I have desired this and worked for it"—The statement was never more true—"as far as I could, through the last Balkan crisis, and Germany having a corresponding object, our relations sensibly improved. The idea has hitherto been too Utopian to form the subject of definite proposals, but if this present crisis, so much more acute than any that Europe has gone through for generations, be safely passed, I am hopeful that the relief and reaction which will follow may make possible some more definite rapprochement between the Powers than has been possible hitherto."

That document, in my opinion, states clearly, in temperate and convincing language the attitude of this Government. Can any one who reads it fail to appreciate the tone of obvious sincerity and earnestness which underlies it; can any one honestly doubt that the Government of this country in spite of great provocation—and I regard the proposals made to us as proposals which we might have thrown aside without consideration and almost without answer—can any one doubt that in spite of great provocation the right hon. Gentleman, who had already earned the title—and no one ever more deserved it—of Peace Maker of Europe—persisted to the very last moment of the last hour in that beneficent but unhappily frustrated purpose?

I am entitled to say, and I do so on behalf of this country—I speak not for a party, I speak for the country as a whole—that we made every effort any Government could possibly make for peace. But this war has been forced

upon us. What is it we are fighting for? Every one knows, and no one knows better than the Government, the terrible incalculable suffering, economic, social, personal and political, which war, and especially a war between the Great Powers of the world, must entail.

There is no man amongst us sitting upon this bench in these trying days—more trying perhaps than any body of statesmen for a hundred years have had to pass through, there is not a man amongst us who has not, during the whole of that time, had clearly before his vision the almost unequalled suffering which war, even in a just cause, must bring about, not only to the peoples who are for the moment living in this country and in the other countries of the world, but to posterity and to the whole prospects of European civilization. Every step we took we took with that vision before our eyes, and with a sense of responsibility which it is impossible to describe.

Unhappily, if—in spite of all our efforts to keep the peace, and with that full and overpowering consciousness of the result, if the issue be decided in favour of war—we have, nevertheless, thought it to be the duty as well as the interest of this country to go to war, the House may be well assured it was because we believe, and I am certain the country will believe, we are unsheathing our sword in a just cause.

If I am asked what we are fighting for, I reply in two sentences. In the first place to fulfil a solemn international obligation, an obligation which, if it had been entered in between private persons in the ordinary concerns of life, would have been regarded as an obligation not only of law but of honour, which no self-respecting man could possibly have repudiated. I say, secondly, we are fighting to vindicate the principle which, in these days when force, material force, sometimes seems to be the dominant influence and factor in the development of mankind, we are fighting to vindicate the principle that small nationalities are not to be crushed, in defiance of international good faith, by the arbitrary will of a strong and over-mastering Power. I do not believe any nation ever entered into a great controversy—and this is one of the greatest history will ever know—with a clearer conscience and stronger conviction that it is fighting not for aggression, not for the maintenance even of its own selfish interest, but that it is fighting in defence of principles, the maintenance of which is vital to the civilization of the world.

With a full conviction, not only of the wisdom and justice, but of the obligations which lay upon us to challenge this great issue, we are entering into the struggle. Let us now make sure that all the resources, not only of this United Kingdom, but of the vast Empire of which it is the centre, shall be thrown into the scale, and it is that that object may be adequately secured, that I am now about to ask this Committee—to make the very

unusual demand upon it—to give the Government a Vote of Credit of £100,000,000....

... In all that I have said, I believe I have not gone, either in the statement of our case or in my general description of the provision we think it necessary to make, beyond the strict bounds of truth. It is not my purpose—it is not the purpose of any patriotic man—to inflame feeling, to indulge in rhetoric, to excite international animosities. The occasion is far too grave for that.

We have a great duty to perform, we have a great trust to fulfil, and confidently we believe that Parliament and the country will enable us to do it.

THE END OF VOLUME I

Freeditorial 