

1914, by John French, *Viscount of Ypres*

CHAPTER VI

THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

When day dawned on the ever memorable morning of September 6th, 1914, some ray of the great hopes in which I had indulged during the first two or three days at my Headquarters at Le Cateau seemed to revive. Taught now by a bitter experience, I felt more than ever the necessity of being prepared for anything. There was much, however, to inspire confidence. Great changes had been made amongst the higher commanders in the army of our Allies. The finest military leaders of France were now heading the splendid soldiers of that truly martial nation, and we had all learnt most valuable and practical lessons in the hard school of adversity.

The latest reports showed that French and British soldiers alike were animated by the highest spirit and meant to "do or die." As regards the British Army, reinforcements had arrived, deficiencies in armament and material had been partially made good, and, most important of all, the promise of an immediate advance against the enemy had sent a thrill of exultation and enthusiasm throughout the whole force. A modicum of rest had also been secured.

As I have said before, it is not my purpose in these pages to write a history. Many volumes have been published with this object. They have appeared in many countries and in many languages. A few have seemed to me to be wonderfully accurate accounts, considering the great difficulty of arriving at the truth long before the time when full and authentic material can possibly be available.

All I have had in my mind in writing this book is to explain, so far as I can, my own part throughout these great events in carrying out the responsible task entrusted to me by my country; the aspect in which the situation presented itself in my mind from day to day; and my reasons for the decisions which guided the action of the troops under my command.

My desire here is to recall exactly what was in my mind on the morning of the 6th September, which saw the opening of the Battle of the Marne, and to describe the *view* which presented itself to me of the situation on both sides; in other words, the basis for the orders which were issued to the troops.

These orders were necessarily founded upon my own personal appreciation of the situation as it appeared to me at the moment. It was impossible for me to know that situation accurately in all its details. For instance, I could not then know, as I know now, that the Germans had abandoned their vigorous offensive 24 hours earlier than this, nor should I have conceived it possible that they could have done so.

Reverting, then, to my general view of things on the morning of the 6th; in the first place, my personal conference with Joffre on the night of the 5th had put me in full possession of his exact plans and all that was in his mind.

His intention was to attack at all points *au fond*, to inflict a crushing defeat on the whole German Army on our front by assailing its flank with the 6th French and British Armies attacking from a line running roughly from Le Plessis-Belleville on the north through Cuisy—Iverny—Neufmontiers—Meaux, across the Marne to Villers-sur-Morin—Rozoy—la Chapelle Iger to Gastins on the south.

At the same time the 5th French Army was to advance north from its present position and, with all the French Armies to its right, Franchet d'Esperey was to make a simultaneous frontal attack.

The following were General Joffre's orders of September 4th:—

1. Advantage must be taken of the risky situation of the German 1st Army to concentrate against it the efforts of the Allied Armies on our extreme left. All preparations must be made during the 5th for an attack on the 6th September.

2. The following general arrangements are to be carried out by the evening of September 5th:—

(a) All the available forces of the 6th Army north-east of Meaux are to be ready to cross the Ourcq between Lizy and May-en-Multien, in the general direction of Château-Thierry. The available portions of the 1st Cavalry Corps which are close at hand are to be handed over to General Maunoury for this operation.

(b) The British Army is to establish itself on the line Changis—Coulommiers, facing east, ready to attack in the general direction of Montmirail.

(c) The 5th Army will close slightly on its left and take up the general line Courtaçon—Esternay—Sézanne, ready to attack, generally speaking, from south to north. The 2nd Cavalry Corps will ensure connection between the British Army and the 5th Army.

(d) The 9th Army will cover the right of the 5th Army by holding the southern outlets of the St. Gond marshes and by placing part of its forces on the tableland north of Sézanne.

3. These different armies are to attack on the morning of September 6th.

The 8th Division of the 4th French Corps was to arrive south of Meaux during the early morning and maintain connection with the British 3rd Corps about Villers-sur-Morin, whence the British line following the points named above was facing nearly due east.

My own view of the enemy's situation and intentions was fairly in accordance with the Germans' actual positions, although I did not know at that time that a retreat had really set in, or how the various Corps and Divisions were placed. Judging from the Air and Cavalry reconnaissances and from Intelligence Reports, I thought that a large part of von Kluck's 1st Army was now south of the Grand Morin River, and that the enemy's western columns had crossed the Marne about Meaux and Trilport, although one or two Divisions were still north of that river and west of the Ourcq. From the fact that the rearguards of both my 1st and 2nd Corps in their retirement on the day previous were slightly engaged, whilst a few outpost affairs were reported as having occurred in the night, I judged the enemy to have got some distance south of the Grand Morin River. The appearance of hostile cavalry detachments on the previous evening indicated the presence of that arm.

Whilst it appeared to me that our dispositions promised great things, I also realised fully that the situation demanded the utmost care and watchfulness, as everything depended on the timing of our movements, the utmost measure of mutual support, and the most vigorous and continuous attacks.

The area in which the British Army operated in the Battle of the Marne may be described as the country enclosed between the tributaries of the Marne, the Ourcq on the north and the Grand Morin on the

south, between which boundaries it is intersected by the Marne itself, and a third tributary, the Petit Morin.

This area forms the western portion of the Plateau de la Brie, which rises to a height of 400 to 500 feet above the plain of Champagne. The general slope of the ground is from east to west. The plateau is of rock formation, and the rivers, which were formerly of greater volume than at present, have worn away deep channels, with the result that the ground falls very steeply to the river-beds. A certain amount of alluvial deposit has been brought down by the rivers and streams, in the immediate vicinity of which are to be found marshy pools and swamps. With the exception of the Forêt de Crécy, to the south-west of the area under consideration, there are no extensive woods, the higher ground being covered with small copses of thick undergrowth with a sprinkling of oak.

The country generally is open, and presents no obstacles to the passage of troops of all arms. The steep cliffs rising abruptly from the river-beds afford good defensive positions suitable for rearguard actions, obliging an advancing force to concentrate at defiles.

The roads and railways follow generally the course of the rivers.

The chief roads are :

(a) Paris—Meaux—La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, where one branch continues through Montmirail to Châlons, and

the other bends slightly north through Château-Thierry and Dormans to Rheims and Epernay.

(b) Paris—Lagny—Coulommiers—La Ferté-Gaucher—Esternay.

(c) Soissons—Villers-Cotterets—Meaux, and thence through the Forêt de Crécy to Melun.

The chief railways are :

(1) Paris—Nanteuil—Crépy-en-Valois, thence to Compiègne and Soissons.

(2) Paris—Meaux—Rheims (following the Ourcq).

(3) Paris—Meaux—Château-Thierry—Epernay (following the Marne).

(4) Paris—Tournan, through the Forêt de Crécy to Coulommiers, and thence to Esternay (following the Grand Morin).

In addition to the roads mentioned above, which are *routes nationales*, there are numerous smaller roads (*routes départementales*) which are practicable for all arms and transport. In places the gradients are steep where the roads cross the deep beds of the rivers.

The march of the Army on the morning of the 6th was ordered in a direction bearing generally about east-north-east, and I did not then expect to reach the Grand Morin River the same evening, as heavy fighting was most probable.

I joined Haig about 9.30 a.m. He was then engaged all along his front against detachments of the enemy, which appeared to be advanced guards with some supporting cavalry. The fighting had commenced about 7.30 a.m. by a move of hostile infantry on Rozoy. They were attacked and thrown back by the 4th Guards Brigade.

Although the German artillery was in action early in the day, close observation, combined with constant reports, showed us before noon that this advance was not being pushed with much vigour, and later (the right of the 1st Division being thrust forward towards Vaudoy, the left of the 2nd Division at Ormeaux), as we attempted to close with them, it was discovered that a general retreat was in progress, covered by rearguards.

A visit which I paid to the 2nd Corps on Haig's left confirmed this impression.

On this I gave orders that the enemy was to be closely pressed, and that, if possible, the line of the Grand Morin River was to be made good before night.

As a matter of fact, this was not done till the next day, but a considerable further advance was made. Our cavalry from Gastins drove the enemy back north of Dagny.

On the morning of September 7th, the 2nd Cavalry Brigade was acting as left flank guard to the Cavalry Division, with the 9th Lancers as advanced guard to the Brigade.

On reaching Frétoy, the village of Moncel was found to be occupied by a patrol of Germans, and was taken at a gallop by the leading troop, followed by the one remaining machine gun of the regiment. About a troop and a half, accompanied by the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel D. Campbell and Major Beale-Browne, moved up on the left of the village. Shortly afterwards two squadrons of the 1st Garde Dragoner charged the village and drove out the troop of the 9th Lancers after a little street fighting. A third Dragoner squadron then came up to the village from the north in support. The troop and a half of the 9th Lancers, led by the Commanding Officer and 2nd in Command, attacked this squadron in perfect order, charged the left half of the German squadron and pierced it with loss, both sides facing the charge; the Germans at a 15-mile rate and the 9th Lancers at speed.

Swinging round after the charge, the 9th Lancers gained the village and rallied on the south of it. At the same time, the 18th Hussars, who had been sent up in support, drove off the Germans by fire from the wood on the left of the village. In this charge by the 9th Lancers Lieutenant-Colonel Campbell was wounded in the arm by a lance and in the leg by a bullet, both wounds, however, being slight. The adjutant, Captain G. F. Reynolds, was severely wounded in the shoulder by a lance. Lieutenant Alfrey, the machine-gun officer, who must have gone to his assistance from the village, was killed whilst extracting the lance from Captain

Reynolds. Our casualties were slight—one officer (Lieutenant Alfrey) killed, two men killed; two officers (Lieutenant-Colonel Campbell and Captain Reynolds) wounded and five men wounded. The number of Germans left on the ground was considerable.

Shortly afterwards, "I" Battery, R.H.A., was moved to the north of the village, and the 18th Hussars were sent to Faujus and to a line of trees to the south of that village.

"B" Squadron, 18th Hussars, under Major Leveson, took up a position by this line of trees, dismounting in the corn stooks, and was immediately charged by a German squadron in perfect order, in line at close order. The 18th Hussars squadron met the charge with well-directed fire at close range, and the German squadron was almost annihilated. A few passed through the firing line and were shot by the horse holders. Thirty-two dead and wounded Germans were counted on the ground in front of the squadron, and of the 60 or 70 which charged not more than a dozen escaped. A second charge was attempted shortly afterwards, but did not approach closer than 400 yards.

Aircraft at night reported the German 2nd Corps (which had been moving north nearly all day) to have entered a large forest from which we supposed them to be debouching through Lizy north of the wood.

The 3rd Corps were practically in reserve, but moved up during the day a little on our left rear.

On this day I saw most of the troops and found them in excellent spirits.

The 6th French Army on our left was opposed chiefly by the German 4th Reserve Corps, which, however, was reinforced by a considerable part of the retiring 2nd Corps. The 4th German Corps had also been directed towards this part of the battlefield.

The 5th French Army on our right, after a heavy day's desperate fighting, reached the line Courtaçon—Esternay—La Villeneuve-les-Charleville. At the close of the advance and fighting on the 6th, I returned to Melun to receive reports and ascertain the general situation of the Allied Forces. It was perfectly clear now that the enemy had abandoned the offensive and was in full retreat towards the Marne. I sent a despatch to General Joffre, telling him of our work during the day and the points we had reached, and requested instructions from him for the 7th.

Very late at night I got his reply, telling me that the 5th Army had made good progress, which had been materially helped by the pressure of the British Forces east of the enemy's right flank. He asked me to continue the move to-morrow, but in a rather more northerly direction.

During the night of the 6th-7th it became necessary to study the situation with great care. Joffre's original plan presupposed a continued German advance to the south and south-east, culminating in a great attack on

the 5th and 9th French Armies. His directions to me on the 5th were to move *east*, and attack this advance in flank.

It was to attain that object that the moves of the 6th were ordered, and, as a matter of fact, the 1st Corps under Haig did move almost due east. The troops which opposed him were on that day supposed to be the flank guard of the enemy which was attacking the 5th French Army.

As stated above, I spent some time in the morning of the 6th with the 1st Corps, but it was not before noon that the possibility of a German retirement began to take shape in my mind. The conviction that such a retirement was actually taking place was increased as the day wore on and after my visits to the 2nd and 3rd Corps.

It was on my return to Melun late in the evening of this day that Air and Intelligence Reports, combined with the impression which my own observations had made upon me, left no doubt in my mind that the German retreat had really been in full progress for many hours, and that the British Army must be immediately moved in a direction which would bring it in close contact with the enemy.

Orders were therefore issued directing the march on the Grand Morin River, which was to be forced and passed with all possible speed on the 7th.

Joffre's request to me to move in a rather more northerly direction pointed to some such conclusion; but

I do not think that his information during the day had impressed him to the same extent with the drastic change in the situation, and the fact that the Germans had so soon taken the alarm and been overtaken by a veritable "panic."

My intention to close at all speed with the enemy had to be tempered by consideration for the French Armies on my flank, both of which were opposed by much larger forces.

It was necessary to keep close touch with Franchet d'Esperey on my right, and to direct the movements of the 3rd Corps on my left so as to bring the best possible support to the hard-pressed right of the 6th Army, who were fighting there so gallantly and well.

The cavalry acted with great vigour in advance of the Army throughout the 7th, and on that day the Grand Morin River was forced and positions were taken up well to the north-east of it.

The 5th and 6th French Armies were both heavily engaged throughout the 7th. The left of the 5th Army on my right reached La Ferté—Gaucher at nightfall.

The position of the British Army at daybreak on the 8th was, roughly :

- *3rd Corps*—La Haute Maison.
- *2nd Corps*—Aulnoy and neighbourhood.
- *1st Corps*—Chailly and Jouy-sur-Morin.

The problem before me on the night of the 7th-8th may be stated thus :

I knew that the 5th Army on my right had been heavily opposed on the 7th, and that powerful forces of the enemy were still in front of it. The 6th Army was fighting hard west of the Ourcq, opposed to nearly all the German 1st Army. I gathered at this time that the enemy forces opposing our own immediate advance consisted chiefly of cavalry with a strong artillery supporting, backed up by some infantry detachments.

I have referred before in this book to a visit I paid to Germany in 1911. On that occasion I saw a great deal of German cavalry in manœuvre, and the knowledge I thus acquired enabled me to estimate the value of the forces which were now opposing me.

For years the German cavalry have been trained in rearguard action such as the work they were now doing. They carry a large quantity of machine guns, which they are trained to handle very efficiently. To each brigade of cavalry there is attached a regiment of jäger, picked riflemen, chosen for their skill in shooting and in taking advantage of ground. These troops are specially valuable for the defence of river lines and positions which are intended to cause delay to an advancing enemy.

There was little doubt in my mind that the Petit Morin and Grand Morin rivers could be forced with comparative ease, but I knew that good troops would be

required, and the chief question to be considered at that moment was how the hardly-pressed 6th French Army could best be assisted whilst effective connection with the 5th French Army on the right was safeguarded.

There was the certainty that the passages of the Marne opposite my left flank, between Changis and La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, would be strongly guarded, and that our advance at this point would be very difficult. A large force of German heavy artillery was reported to be in the loop of the river near Varreddes.

After considering alternatives of action, *e.g.*, the possibility of sending round direct help to Maunoury, or the advisability of strengthening my left flank to ensure a quicker passage there, I decided that the best help I could bring to the 6th Army was to effect a speedy passage of the Grand Morin, Petit Morin, and Marne rivers.

The course of the Marne at the point to be passed from left to right was generally north-east, and the British Army after passing would be facing north-west, which would bring it almost directly upon the line of retreat of the 1st German Army, which was in close contact with Maunoury across the Ourcq. The adoption of any other method of action which I had considered must have meant delay and a weakening of my front. What was wanted was a speedy decision of the critical situation on the left.

I had also to remember the necessity of keeping up close connection with d'Esperey on my right. Orders were accordingly issued for a general attack on the Petit Morin River, to begin early on the 8th.

On that morning I found Haig at La Trétoire (north of Rebais), near where the 4th Guards Brigade of the 2nd Division (2nd Batt. Grenadier Guards, 2nd and 3rd Batts. Coldstream Guards, 1st Batt. Irish Guards), supported by some field batteries, were forcing the passage of the Petit Morin.

I can well recall the scene. We were on some high ground which was intersected by rocky ravines and sandhills. Just below where we stood was the village, into which the enemy were putting a good many shells, and beyond it lay the line of the Petit Morin stream with its wooded, shelving banks, upon which the enemy was holding a strong rearguard position on the further bank.

The 5th Brigade was brought up in support of the 4th, and the heavy artillery were got into action. The crossing of the river at this point was stoutly opposed for a considerable time; but the passage of it, when secured, was much assisted by the cavalry and the 1st Division, which had effected a crossing some way higher up.

The detailed story of this great fight is worth the telling. Approaching the river on a fairly wide front, on the right of the 1st Corps was the 1st Guards Brigade with a troop of the 15th Hussars, some Cyclists, the

23rd Field Co., R.E., and the 26th Brigade, R.F.A., which, under General Maxse, formed the advance guard to the 1st Division in its advance from Jouy-sur-Morin to Bassevelle. A French Cavalry Division was operating on our right and front, covered by our Cavalry Division.

At 9.15 a.m. a French cavalry officer reported to Maxse that French cavalry was in occupation of the heights to the north of Bellot. At 9.30 a.m. the 1st Batt. Black Watch and one battery of the 26th Brigade, R.F.A., had reached Bellot village, and the main guard was approaching the village through a ravine, when a battery of the enemy's horse artillery opened fire on the column from high ground near Fontaine St. Robert. The fire was quickly silenced by French horse artillery guns which co-operated with our 26th Brigade. The casualties were remarkably low considering the circumstances.

An alarming report reached General Maxse that a brigade of French cavalry was cooped up in Bellot exposed to artillery fire, and that a large force of German infantry was advancing southwards through the woods to attack them. This somewhat delayed the further advance of our troops.

It was 10.40 a.m. when Colonel Grant Duff advanced to seize and picket the heights north of the valley of the Petit Morin and to safeguard the advance of the column down the valley to Sablonnières. This main guard crossed the Petit Morin at 11 a.m., and shortly

afterwards the advance guard was in contact with some 250 of the enemy's jäger of the Guard in the thick woods north of the ravine.

Some close fighting ensued, during which the Black Watch and Cameron Highlanders suffered casualties. The enemy lost some 50 killed and 50 wounded. Subsequently the advance was continued northwards on Hondevilliers, the 1st Guards Brigade advancing on the east and the 3rd Brigade on the west of the ravine. Advanced troops reached Bassevelle. The 43rd Howitzer Brigade and 26th Heavy Battery were engaged in supporting the advance of the 2nd Division during the day.

On the left the 4th (Guards) Brigade and the 41st Brigade, R.F.A., under Lieutenant-Colonel Lushington, R.F.A., formed the advanced guard to the 2nd Division moving from St. Simeon via Rebais and La Trétoire.

When the vanguard of the 3rd Coldstream Guards had just passed La Trétoire, shell fire was opened on them from the high ground round Boitron.

The enemy's guns did not remain long in action; but the crossing was held by the enemy, who had a machine-gun battery. The valley is closely wooded, and the machine guns were so well placed that, whenever our infantry came into action, they were met by a heavy fire from these guns. The other battalions were brought up one by one to support the 3rd Coldstream Guards;

two guns were placed at the bend in the road just north of La Trétoire, and howitzers were also brought up north of that village.

At 12 noon the Worcestershire Regt. was sent to assist the 4th (Guards) Brigade, and moved *viâ* La Trétoire—Launoy—N. of Ruine—Moulin Neuf, to force the passage of the river at Le Gravier, and to work up stream to assist the Guards Brigade.

By 1.30 p.m. the bridge had been seized by the Worcestershire Regt., who captured about 30 prisoners in the farm by the bridge. The 2nd Grenadier Guards also managed to cross at La Forge.

The enemy retired, leaving a good many dead and two machine guns in our hands.

An advance was then made to the north of Boitron church, where the Divisional Artillery came into action.

The Connaught Rangers were despatched to work down the right bank to assist the passage of the 3rd Division. They encountered some opposition at Le Moulin du Pont, but pushed on to near Orly, where they found the 3rd Division already across the river.

At 2.30 p.m. the Grenadiers and 2nd Batt. Coldstream Guards were sent northwards to protect the front, whilst the Highland Light Infantry were sent towards Bussières to endeavour to cut off the enemy's retreat.

The remainder of the 5th Infantry Brigade were engaged with small bodies of the enemy in the woods north-east of the Bécherelle—Maison Neuve road, but the Brigadier-General withdrew his three battalions, fearing they would fire on the 4th Brigade and Highland Light Infantry, and they reached Boitron about 5 p.m., except one company of the Connaught Rangers, which worked through the woods and emerged at Le Cas Rouge, and claimed to have headed off some German stragglers. Meanwhile, at about 4.30 p.m. the enemy made a counter-attack with machine guns against our gun position from the woods north-west of Boitron church. This was dealt with by the Guards Brigade. The 3rd Coldstream Guards and Irish Guards made a direct attack, whilst the 2nd Coldstream Guards swung round against the enemy. The whole machine-gun battery of five guns surrendered with 100 personnel.

I then went to Smith-Dorrien, whose Headquarters were at Doué. His corps had then forced the passage of the river, but had encountered severe opposition in doing so.

I found the 3rd Corps on the left advancing well at all points, driving the enemy before them and inflicting considerable loss all along the line. Pulteney was in touch with the 8th French Division on his left; and Gough, with the 3rd Cavalry Brigade (4th Hussars, 5th Lancers, and 16th Lancers), was successfully engaged all the morning on the left flank. There appeared to be a

considerable force of the enemy in the woods lying to the south of Lizy, north of the Marne, and later reports stated that some 90 German guns were deployed there against the right flank of the 6th French Army.

I impressed on Pulteney the necessity for pushing on to the utmost of his ability in aid of the 6th Army. It looked as if he would have considerable opposition at Changis and La Ferté-sous-Jouarre. The Germans retiring over the Marne at the latter place occupied the town in strength and blew up the bridge.

Although the 3rd Corps were not able to pass the Marne till daybreak on the 10th, there could be no doubt that the vigour of Pulteney's attack took considerable pressure off the right of the 6th French Army. The British troops fought all along the line with splendid spirit, energy, and determination, and they were skilfully handled and led.

From what I could observe, however, it seemed to me that the infantry were not in a wide enough formation, and perhaps in some cases the field artillery were not pushed far enough forward. I called attention to these points in the following Memorandum, which was issued on the 10th :

"The latest experiences have shown that the enemy never neglects an opportunity to use all his available artillery in forward positions under cover of cavalry and other mobile troops.

"Our cavalry is now organised in two Divisions, the first of three, the second of two Brigades, each with a Brigade of Horse Artillery. During the present phase of the operations — which consist of as rapid a pursuit and pressure of the enemy as possible in his retreat — two Corps will generally be in first line. A Cavalry Division will be directed to work on the front and flank of either Corps and well in advance. The Commander of the cavalry will remain in the closest concert with the Corps Commanders on the flank on which he is working.

"The Corps Commanders will send forward with the cavalry as much of their field artillery as can be usefully employed in harassing the enemy's retirement. They will place them under the direction of the Cavalry Commander for the day, the latter officer being responsible for their safety.

"When, owing to the approach of darkness, the field artillery can no longer find useful targets, they will be withdrawn from the cavalry back to the Division to which they belong. Should the enemy make any decided stand during such operations and a general action arise or become imminent, the field artillery in the front will either fall back or retain their position, at the discretion of the Corps Commander, and again come under their Divisional Commander.

"The withdrawal from under the supervision of the Cavalry Commander will always remain at the discretion of the Corps Commander.

"I wish to call the attention of Corps Commanders to the necessity of warning their infantry against what is known as 'bunching up.' Losses and delay in overcoming rearguards resistance during the present phase of the operations have undoubtedly been caused by this.

"Instances have also occurred when undue delay in effecting the passage of a river has been caused by a failure to realise the nature of the problem from the purely local standpoint.

"Small flanking parties, crossing at unguarded points by hastily improvised means, will dislodge hostile infantry and Maxims much more quickly and effectively than by frontal attacks, however powerfully supported by artillery."

On the night of the 9th and 10th, the 3rd Corps occupied La Ferté-sous-Jouarre and the left bank of the Marne, but were unable to cross, and our left ran roughly eastward through Bussières and Boitron to Hondevilliers.

In all the villages which the enemy had so hastily occupied and evacuated, there was evidence of violent damage and looting.

At La Ferté-sous-Jouarre, Doué, and Rebais, there were signs of great disorder and lack of discipline.

At daybreak on the 9th the advance on the Marne was continued. My Headquarters were now at Coulommiers,

where a number of Air reports were received early in the day. They seemed to show that the powerful German battery of 90 guns which had been located on the previous day in Lizy had been withdrawn, and that the enemy in front of the 5th French Army was somewhat reduced. The front of the 5th French Army was apparently clear up to the Marne.

A considerable concentration of Germans was said to be between Chateau-Thierry and Marigny, but as the large columns in the rear were seen to be marching north, this looked only like a strong rearguard.

The following orders were issued to the troops at 7-30 p.m. on the 8th:—

"General Headquarters,
"September 8th, 1914.

"1. The enemy are continuing their retreat northwards and our Army has been successfully engaged during the day with their rearguards on the Petit Morin, thereby materially assisting the progress of the French Armies on our right and left, which the enemy have been making great efforts to oppose.

"2. The Army will continue the advance north tomorrow at 5 a.m., attacking rearguards of the enemy wherever met. The Cavalry Division will act in close association with the 1st Corps and gain touch with the 5th French Army on the right. Gen. Gough, with the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades, will act in close association

with the 2nd Corps and gain touch with the 6th French Army on the left.

"3. Roads are allotted as follows :

"1st Corps.

"Eastern road, Sablonnières—Hondevilliers—Nogent—l'Artaud—Saulchéry, eastern side of Charly-sur-Marne.

"Western road: La Trétoire—Boitron—Pavant—western side of Charly—Villiers-sur-Marne—Domptin—Coupru; both inclusive.

"2nd Corps.

"Western road: St. Ouen—Saacy—Méry—Montreuil inclusive, and all roads between this and western road of 1st Corps exclusive.

"3rd Corps.

"Western road: La Ferté-sous-Jouarre—Dhuisy; western road of 2nd Corps exclusive.

"Supply Railheads for September 9th, 1914.

- Cavalry Division Chaumes.
- Brig.-Gen. Gough's Brigades Chaumes.
- 1st Corps Coulommiers.
- 2nd Corps Coulommiers.
- 3rd Corps Mortcerf.

- L. of C. (line of communications)Chaumes.
- G.H.Q. (General Headquarters)Chaumes.
- R.F.C. (Royal Flying Corps)Chaumes.
- Ammunition railroadVerneuil.

"Reports to Melun till 9 a.m., after that hour to Coulommiers.

"A. J. MURRAY, Lieut.-Gen.,
"Chief of the General Staff."

Allenby, with the cavalry, seized the bridges at Charly-sur-Marne and Saulchéry and, advancing rapidly to the high ground north about Fontaine Fauvel, covered the rapid passage of the 1st Corps over these bridges. Clearing the ground of the enemy and making many captures, the 1st Army Corps reached Domptin, and the cavalry the heights about Montgivrault, some miles further north.

The 3rd Division of the 2nd Corps, to the left, seized and crossed the bridge at Nanteuil early in the day. The 5th Division (2nd Corps) crossed at Méry, but was then held up for some time by German artillery said to be in the neighbourhood of La Sablonnière. It was essential to my general plan that the 2nd Corps should not get too far north until the 1st and 3rd Corps were completely established on the further bank of the Marne. Smith-Dorrien was instructed accordingly.

As the fight progressed during the day, our 3rd Corps at La Ferté-sous-Jouarre and the 8th French Division at Changis found difficulty in crossing the river. I then instructed Smith-Dorrien to send one Division towards Dhuisy to menace the rear of the troops opposing these crossings. The 5th Division was directed there, but as they were unable to overcome the enemy's resistance they only succeeded in reaching Montreuil, 2 miles S.E. of Dhuisy, very late at night.

I found Pulteney south of La Ferté early in the morning, and heavy fighting going on to gain the passage of the river which the enemy was still vigorously disputing. It was a remarkable scene. The banks of the Marne at this point are somewhat steep, and there is high commanding ground on either side of the river. The old town of La Ferté, so famous in Napoleon's campaign of 1814, presented a picturesque appearance with its ancient church and buildings. Surrounded and held by the enemy, it seemed to frown down on the broken bridge, forbidding all approach. The enemy was vigorously defending the passage, strongly supported by artillery from the high ground north of the town.

The 4th Division in two columns attempted to advance on the bridge with a view to repairing it and then to close and establish a bridgehead on the northern bank, but all their attempts were frustrated by the German guns. Just after dark, however, Hunter Weston's 11th Brigade (1st Batt. Somersetshire Light Infantry,

1st Batt. East Lancashire Regt.,
1st Batt. Hampshire Regt., and 1st Batt. Rifle Brigade)
was able to reach the southern bank, where a number of
boats were seized. In these the brigade was pushed
across, and by 10 p.m. had established an effective
footing on the northern bank, under cover of which a
pontoon bridge was constructed by the Royal Engineers
of the 4th Division under very heavy fire. It was a very
fine piece of work, to which the Commander of the 3rd
Corps particularly drew my attention. During this
operation Colonel Le Marchant was killed.

Another detachment also effected a crossing further up
the river in the neighbourhood of Chamigny, but the
main body of the 3rd Corps crossed by the pontoon
bridge in the early hours of the 10th.

I found Smith-Dorrien at Pulteney's Headquarters.

The 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades were operating
between the 3rd and 2nd Corps, filling up the gap,
which, however, in view of the enemy's hurried
retirement, never caused me any apprehension.

It has been stated that on the 8th I called upon
General Maunoury for assistance in forcing the river,
and that this was the reason why the French 8th
Division was not taken away.

I can only say that no such request was ever made by
me or my Headquarters Staff, nor had any other
commander my sanction for such a demand. I felt
throughout the battle that my principal *rôle* was to bring

assistance in the best manner and in the most effective direction to the 6th Army, for I fully appreciated the much greater difficulty of the task which they were undertaking. On the other hand my diary shows that on the 9th I received two urgent messages from Maunoury begging me to take the pressure of the enemy's 3rd Corps off him, and I think the action of the British Army on the 9th had this effect.

In the afternoon I rode across the Marne at Nogent and met several units of the 1st Army Corps moving up the heights of the north side of the river. I was tremendously struck by their general appearance and attitude. They were full of spirit and fired with enthusiasm. They had upon them that war-worn look which we all know so well, but one felt, as one rode beside them, that here were troops whom nothing could stop, who asked only to be led forward, and who were enveloped in an atmosphere of confidence and victory.

They were very tired, however; how tired was not brought fully home to me until I came to the 5th Cavalry Brigade (the Scots Greys, 12th Lancers, and 20th Hussars).

The whole brigade was dismounted behind some woods on the heights. Every man of them, except a small proportion of horse holders, was lying fast asleep on the ground.

Accompanied by the Brigadier (Chetwode), I rode into the midst of the sleeping mass, my horse picking his way through the recumbent figures. They hardly stirred.

I was anxious to say a few words to the men, and the Brigadier asked me if he should call them up to attention. I said, "No, let them rest," adding that I would talk to them for anyone to hear who happened to be awake and not too done up to listen. I thanked them, as they lay there on the ground, for all they had done; I told them of the situation and of our hopes of complete victory. A few men tried to struggle up; others, half awake, leaned on their elbows and drowsily listened. I hardly realised that they had heard anything of what I had said. This particular regiment was the Scots Greys, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Bulkeley Johnson, who afterwards fell so gallantly at the head of his brigade on the Ancre. Bulkeley Johnson subsequently told me that every word I had spoken on that occasion was published afterwards in the local papers all over Scotland. From the Greys I went on to the other two regiments of the brigade and the horse batteries, where I witnessed similar scenes.

On my return to Headquarters I received the welcome news that the 5th French Army on my right was across the river and in close touch with the British; and that the 6th French Army, after desperate fighting, had practically got possession of the lower bridges of the Ourcq, to which river the enemy was only clinging on his northern flank in order, apparently, to cover his

retreat. In short, since noon the Germans had given up resistance and were now, at nightfall, in full retreat.

During this day we made large captures in prisoners and war material, and our position at night was (roughly) along the line La Ferté—Bezu—Domptin, with the cavalry well forward.

In my dispatches of September 17th, 1914, I estimated that the Battle of the Marne reached its conclusion on the night of September 10th, and I see no reason to think otherwise now.

On that night the British forces reached the line La Ferté—Milon—Neuilly—St. Front—Rocourt.

The 6th French Army had been wheeling up their right into line with us, and the 5th French Army was nearly in line on our right. The enemy were in full retreat to the north and north-east. During the day, the cavalry, the 1st Army Corps, and the 2nd Army Corps had fought numerous engagements with the enemy's rearguard, and had made large captures. Allenby, as usual, had handled his cavalry with great vigour and skill, nor had his detachments of the 3rd and 5th Brigades on the left under General Gough been less energetic. The bridging of the Marne at La Ferté-sous-Jouarre by engineers of the 3rd Corps was a fine piece of work. Our casualties were heavy, but, having regard to the results attained, by no means excessive.

I was able to visit some of the hospital trains on the 10th. Although there had been no chance yet of fully

developing the organisation of the wounded transport service, I think the best was done with the means available at the moment.

Much has been written to recount the story of this great battle, and, doubtless for the next century, controversy will rage over the event and its results.

At the opening of the battle, on the morning of September 6th, the Allied forces had to turn from the task of arranging defensive positions on the Seine. The 5th French Army and the British Army had already fallen back close to that river in accordance with the general plan, and the rear echelons of transport, etc. rested to the south of it.

Between September 6th and 12th the German Army was driven back pell-mell from the Seine to the Marne, a distance of 65 miles, whilst the front extended from Paris to Verdun. Their losses in officers, men, prisoners, guns, machine guns, and war material were enormous. Most desperate battles were fought all along the line.

Many different views have been put forward regarding the initial foundation upon which the Germans built up their strategic scheme for the invasion of France. It is not my purpose here to discuss them or to speculate upon what was actually in the minds of the Great General Staff when they set out upon this gigantic enterprise. Whatever the original conception may have been, I claim for the Allies that its fulfilment was crushed for ever and a day at the Battle of the Marne.

Splendidly, however, as the Allied Armies fought, skilfully as each of the various corps and armies which were engaged supported one another; it was the Germans themselves who deliberately threw away whatever chance they ever had of securing a decisive victory. We have seen that so late as the morning of September 6th, Joffre and I were still so certain that the German thrust was in full career that an advance by the British Army in an almost easterly direction was ordered and partially undertaken.

Yet at that time von Kluck's great "advance" had for some hours become a counter-march in hurried "retreat."

Why this sudden change ?

Because he then discovered that his communications were about to be threatened on the Ourcq. Surely the most inexperienced of generals might have anticipated some such threat, and, further, might have realised that the line of the River Ourcq afforded him the most convenient and efficient means of securing flank protection. It has been said by critics of the battle that, had Maunoury delayed his movement on the Ourcq, von Kluck would not have taken alarm. But when the German General first ordered the counter-march the French General had hardly recrossed the Marne.

The fact probably is that von Kluck and his Staff never really liked the *rôle* which was forced upon them by the Great General Staff, and that they undertook their part

in the battle with wavering minds and with their heads half turned round.

When the Allied Armies look back to this great battle and realise what was accomplished, they cannot fail to remember with a thrill of pride that they fought and badly defeated an army not only flushed with the knowledge that it had effected a tremendous inroad into the enemy's territory, but which also enjoyed one other incalculable advantage; it was commanded and led by a Sovereign who possessed absolute authority — military and civil. Its Emperor and Commander-in-Chief was served by a Great General Staff which had been steadily and vigorously preparing for this tremendous trial of strength for a period of over forty years.

This great collision of nations in arms had been kept steadfastly in view. In the preparation of the German Army for this supreme moment not a chance had been thrown away. In man power, armament, training, and equipment; in the instruction of leaders and officers; on the choice of commanders and every other element which makes for efficiency in an army, the most laborious thought and care had been expended.

Compare with this the conditions in which the French and British Armies had been brought up to this fateful hour — systems, staffs, military policy, even money grants, all undergoing constant and drastic change year after year with every fresh wave of popular opinion and every fresh clamour, whilst the intrigues which run riot

in all branches of the public service when "votes" rule everything, exercised their usual baneful influence.

As regards the tactical aspect of the Battle of the Marne, I believe that the name of Marshal Joffre will descend to posterity with that battle as one of the greatest military commanders in history; I believe that the battles fought and won throughout the great length of the line over which they took place by the Armies of France under their splendid leaders, will outshine for valour and skill even those glorious deeds of the past, the memorials of which deck their colours with imperishable laurels.

For the British Army I claim that we carried out the *rôle* assigned to us, and that our rapid passages of the various river lines in face of great opposition, and our unexpected appearance on the lines of retreat of the forces opposing the 5th and 6th Armies, were practically decisive of the great result.