

**1914, by John French, *Viscount of Ypres***

## **CHAPTER IX**

### **THE LAST DAYS OF THE BRITISH OPERATIONS ON THE AISNE — THE NORTHERN MOVE**

I spent some hours on October 1st closely examining the centre of the enemy's position on the Aisne, and arrived at the conclusion that troops had certainly been withdrawn and that the Germans were weaker in strength. I was not, moreover, apprehensive of any great difficulty in effecting our withdrawal from the Aisne front, and I prepared at once to carry out the arrangements made with Joffre.

Operation orders were issued ordering the 2nd Corps (less the 16th Infantry Brigade) to withdraw during the nights of October 1st-2nd and 2nd-3rd, and assemble in the area Cuiry—Houssé—Oulchy-le-Château with a view to moving to Pont Ste. Maxence (12 miles south-west of Compiègne), there to entrain for the left flank; the 1st and 3rd Corps and 1st Cavalry Division to be withdrawn when opportunity occurred; the 2nd Cavalry Division and 19th Infantry Brigade to follow the 2nd Corps; the 1st Corps and 16th Infantry Brigade to take over positions at the moment held by the 3rd Division;

the 3rd Corps to take over those held by the 5th Division.

I certainly entertained sanguine hopes at this time, in spite of the bad news received as to the condition of Antwerp, and although such hopes were never realised I still think they were justified. These optimistic anticipations were grounded entirely upon the advance which the Russians were then making through Galicia, and the splendid fights they had put up in East Prussia and Poland. We estimated that they were not far from Cracow, and if that fortress were taken, and the Russians maintained their position, I looked forward to a great reduction of the German forces opposed to us on the Western front.

The Grand Duke Nicholas had proved himself to be a commander of high courage, energy and skill, and we all hoped for great things from his leadership.

At this time we never had the faintest idea of the actual political situation in Russia, and knew nothing of the terrible dissensions and intrigues which were destined to nullify all the magnificent self-sacrifice displayed by the Russian troops, and to ruin every attempt made by these great armies of the East to assist and support the Allied operations.

I feel sure that the British Army officers and men alike will ever hold these Russian soldiers and their loyal leaders in honour and grateful memory and admiration.

Their prompt invasion of Eastern Prussia did much to make the victory of the Marne possible.

As a matter of fact, however, in depending upon our Eastern Allies to the extent that we subsequently did, we showed as limited a mental prevision in the "political" as we did in the "military" outlook.

Just as we had failed during the past to read accurately the lessons as regards the fighting of the future, which modern science and invention should have taught us, so we had never foreseen how unstable and unreliable a country must be whose ruler and Government are absolutely despotic, and in no sense representative of the will of the people. Worse than this, the governing classes in Russia were saturated with disloyalty and intrigue in the most corrupt form. But for their black treachery the war would have ended successfully at the latest in the spring of 1917.

How could such a people successfully withstand the strain of so mighty a clash of arms, especially when the immense foreign loans and the placing of enormous contracts brought grist to the mills of that corrupt mass of financiers whose business in life was only to fatten on the misfortunes of their fellow creatures?

But to proceed with my narrative. Gough's Cavalry Division was moving up towards the north next day. I saw him and discussed the situation fully. I explained the desperate nature of the situation at Antwerp and told him how necessary it was that he should expedite his

movements to the utmost, adding that he must, therefore, avoid being drawn *en route* into any local encounter in which French troops might be engaged.

The situation will be clearer if I state the actual position of the troops on the night of 2nd October.

1st Corps and 16th Infantry Brigade and 32nd R.F.A. Brigade holding former positions and, in addition, the trenches round Vailly formerly held by 3rd Division.

3rd Corps holding former positions and, in addition, the trenches round Missy formerly held by the 5th Division.

1st Cavalry Division as before, but 1st Cavalry Brigade holding trenches covering Condé Bridge.

2nd Cavalry Division moved to area Silly-sur-Ourcq—Hartennes—Ambrief.

2nd Corps. 3rd Division in area Oulchy-le-Château—Grand Rozoy, with 7th Brigade at Cerseuil; two battalions 9th Brigade still in trenches at Vailly to be withdrawn this night (October 2nd).

5th Division in area Couvrelles—Ciry—Nampsteuil-sous-Muret.

On the 3rd, General Sir James Willcocks, commanding the Indian contingent, arrived and reported himself. Of the Indian troops, one cavalry regiment (15th Lancers), one brigade of artillery and two brigades

of infantry had reached Orleans, which was the Indian advance base. I fully discussed the situation with him.

Much has been said and written about the work of the Indian troops in France, and various opinions have been expressed. For my part I can only say that, from first to last, so long as they were under my command, they maintained and probably surpassed even the magnificent traditions of the Indian Army. In a country and climate to which they were totally unaccustomed, the exigencies of the moment required that they should be thrown into action successively by smaller or greater units before they could be properly concentrated.

I shall always gratefully remember the invaluable assistance they and their Commander, Sir James Willcocks, rendered under these difficult conditions in the most critical hours of the First Battle of Ypres, especially the Lahore Division, commanded by General Watkins.

Just after the appearance of the Indian troops in our trenches, we intercepted a German wireless message sent to the enemy commanders on the Indians' front, directing them to take prisoner as many unwounded Indians as possible, to treat them with all possible courtesy and consideration and send them in to Headquarters. It was a cunning attempt to undermine the loyalty of the Indian contingents, but it never met with the slightest success.

I received news on this day that the 21st French Corps had commenced to detrain 3 miles west of Lille. This Corps formed the left of the French Army under de Maud'huy, which was concentrating to the north of de Castelnau, in order to carry on the great attempted outflanking movement.

The Armies under de Castelnau and de Maud'huy, with some cavalry divisions, formed a "group" under the supreme command of General Foch, who was directed also to exercise general control over all the French Armies operating in the northern theatre.

No personal record of my share in the war would be satisfactory to me did it not include special mention of this remarkable man and eminent soldier. Like his great friend Henry Wilson in England, he was at one time head of the Staff College in France. Shortly before the war he paid several visits to England. It was on the occasion of one of these that I first made his acquaintance. All the world knows the splendid work he did in the first weeks of the war, and it gave me the greatest pleasure and satisfaction to find myself so closely associated with him in the northern theatre. I hope it is not too much to say that, during this time, our acquaintance ripened into a fast and firm friendship, which has increased and expanded ever since.

I regard General Foch as one of the finest soldiers and most capable leaders I have ever known. In appearance he is slight and small of stature, albeit with a most wiry and active frame. It is in his eyes and the expression of

his face that one sees his extraordinary power. He appreciates a military situation like lightning, with marvellous accuracy, and evinces wonderful skill and versatility in dealing with it. Animated by a consuming energy his constant exclamation "*Attaque! Attaque! Attaque!*" reflected his state of mind, and there can be no doubt that he imbued his troops with much of his spirit. Of all the generals in this great struggle he most resembled in audacious strategy his great master—Napoleon.

Personally I owe a great deal to his invaluable help and cordial co-operation. In the darkest hours of our work together—and there were many such—I never knew him anything but what I have described—bold, hopeful, and cheery; but ever vigilant, wary, and full of resource.

Several local attacks were delivered against the 1st Corps which were repulsed with loss, and I saw little reason to fear that the temporary weakening of our line would have any ill-effects.

The 1st Cavalry Division was now also *en route* for the northern theatre.

On the 5th reports had reached me from Bridges, in Antwerp. He was certainly pessimistic as to the possibility of the fortress holding out until we could relieve it. He told me that the Germans had 16-in. howitzers in position against the forts.

There were indications to-day that considerable German forces were collecting against Foch's left, near Lille, and the flanking movement was making very little progress. German cavalry were reported to be in Hazebrouck.

At Fère-en-Tardenois I received a visit from President Poincaré. He thanked me for all the work the British Army had done in France, and spoke a great deal about the situation at Antwerp. He told me he thought the action of the British War Office in sending troops into Antwerp was a mistake, and expressed great surprise that the control and direction of all the British troops in France was not left entirely in the hands of one Commander-in-Chief.

On the 8th, General Headquarters moved to Abbeville, at which place the 2nd Corps had nearly completed their detrainment. They were concentrating north-east of Abbeville, and their leading troops were on the line Oneux—Nouvion-en-Ponthieu.

The 3rd Corps had been relieved on the Aisne by French troops, and their entrainment at Compiègne was proceeding.

We left Fère-en-Tardenois at 8.30 on the morning of the 8th, and reached General de Castelnau's Headquarters at Breteuil about one. He told me that his 4th Corps was again being very hard pressed, and that the enemy was attacking violently all along his front. The General had just heard that two of his sons had



been killed in action, and was naturally in a very sad and depressed frame of mind.

I then went on to General Foch's Headquarters at Doullens, which I reached about four in the afternoon. He gave me a great reception with a guard of honour.

He took a very optimistic view of the situation, said that the enemy was making no headway anywhere, and that he was gradually getting round the German flank on the north. It gave me a great hope for the future to find him so confident of success.

I explained my plans to him briefly as follows :

The 2nd Corps, having completed its detrainment north of Abbeville, was to march to the line Aire—Béthune. The Corps should arrive there on the 11th; the 3rd Corps was to detrain at St. Omer about the 12th; the cavalry was to move in advance of the 2nd Corps to sweep round by the front and northern flank to clear the ground.

I returned to Abbeville that evening. I found that an officer had arrived from Ostend by motor with a letter from Rawlinson, in which he explained the situation in the north, the details of which we know.

I remained at Abbeville and its neighbourhood on the 9th.

The British move to the north was now in full swing. Abbeville is an important railway junction, and

as I looked down from some high ground commanding a view of all the lines of railway, it was as though every set of metals had its procession of trains as far as the eye could reach. That a flank movement of some magnitude was proceeding must have been apparent to any observer. Some enemy aircraft flew over the ground on which I stood, and I felt sure that the Germans must have had warning of our approach to the north. But if the movement was ever properly reported, very little attention was paid to it, for the subsequent activities of the cavalry and the 3rd Corps were most certainly a surprise to the enemy.

Spies, too, came in and told me that the left of Foch's Army (de Maud'huy's Corps) was holding its own well.

That day I had a long interview with Allenby, and arranged with him to form the cavalry into two divisions, the 1st under de Lisle, the 2nd under Gough. The two, forming the Cavalry Corps, to be, of course, under Allenby's command. I directed him to make Aire by the 10th with the 2nd Cavalry Division, the 1st to follow in support.

I told him that his *rôle* in the immediate future would be to clear the country to the north and north-east, reconnoitring woods, etc., and securing passages over waterways. I warned him that he must be prepared to turn round and support the 2nd Corps if it became necessary, but added that I hoped not to have to call upon him for this.

An air officer (not, however, Sykes) whom I had sent towards Antwerp returned and reported the fall of the fortress. He told me of the great difficulty which had been experienced in withdrawing the Naval Brigade.

On this afternoon (October 9th) I had a message from Rawlinson. He told me that 8,000 French were holding Ghent. He was sending two brigades under Capper to the place in order to cover the retreat of the Belgians to Bruges, and, with the same object, he was directing a brigade of Byng's cavalry on the Lys towards Courtrai.

A wire having arrived from Kitchener putting Rawlinson under my command, I sent the latter instructions.

He was told to hold the line of the Lys if he could, but not to risk a big fight. If he could hold on to these positions I promised to connect up with him by the 13th or 14th. If, however, he were forced to retire, he was directed to do so in the direction of St. Omer, where the 3rd Corps was now detraining.

On the afternoon of the 9th, the 2nd Corps were approaching the line Béthune—Aire, the infantry travelling in motor lorries lent by General Foch. These lorries and motor omnibuses were much used in the ensuing operations, and proved of great value in adding to the mobility of the troops.

On the 10th, orders were sent to Rawlinson to the effect that the troops under his command (namely, the 7th Division and the 3rd Cavalry Division) were to form

the 4th Corps, and that, as soon as the 8th Division came out it would go to him, and Byng's cavalry would be withdrawn.

I was much perturbed at hearing that there was delay on the part of the French in relieving the 1st Corps on the Aisne; Joffre, however, assured me that all Haig's troops should reach St. Omer so as to enable me to get them into line by the 17th or the 19th, and with this I had to be content.

When I visited Smith-Dorrien at his Headquarters at Hesdin, I found that he would not be able to reach the line assigned to him on this night, as the motor lorries were late, and his mounted troops and horses were very tired. I directed him to rest for the night and march at 9 a.m. next morning.

After leaving the 2nd Corps I went to St. Pol and had a long talk with General de Maud'huy (commanding the 10th Army). I learnt from him that things were not going so well north of Loos. He had been obliged to fall back before the attack of the XIXth German Corps, which had come up from Valenciennes. He expected to be forced further west, but promised me to hold a line extending from Béthune to the south-east up to 12 noon on the 12th, if by then the 2nd Corps could have arrived at Béthune.

De Maud'huy was among the best Army Commanders that France had produced in the war. I look back with much pleasure and gratification to my long association

with him. He was of a most cheerful and buoyant temperament and a *bon camarade* in every sense of the word. His skill and dash as a leader are well known.

On leaving him I returned again to Smith-Dorrien, and begged him to hasten his move. He promised to deploy into his new position as early as possible on the following morning.

On this day (October 10th) instructions were sent to Allenby to take the 1st Cavalry Division to join the 2nd near Aire early the next day, and to act on the left front and flank of the 2nd Corps. The Forêt de Nieppe was said to be occupied by German cavalry in some strength.

After a long interview with Foch, we concerted together plans of which the following is a brief outline.

It was agreed that, by the 13th, the British and French troops would be in a position to make a combined advance east. On that day we were to make the line Lille—Courtrai.

The French left was to secure the passage of the Scheldt at Lille; the British centre was to be directed on Courtrai, and was to make good the passage of the Lys at that place.

The road Béthune—Lille—Tournai was to be used by the French, and all roads north of it by the British.

The 4th Corps and Belgians were to be on the left of the advance.

On the evening of the 11th the cavalry had cleared the Forêt de Nieppe (south of Hazebrouck), and were in touch with the Divisional Cavalry of the 6th Division east of that place. They extended thence south-east to the left of the 2nd Corps.

The 2nd Corps had reached the line of the canal, and I directed Smith-Dorrien to wheel up his left the next morning in the direction of Merville and move east to the line Laventie—Lorgies, which would bring him on the immediate left of the French 10th Army.

One division of the 3rd Corps was moving on Hazebrouck.

Rawlinson reported that Capper with two brigades was still in Ghent. His aircraft had brought word that two divisions of the enemy were moving on Alost—Termonde—Lokeren, and that five pontoon bridges had been constructed by the Germans at Termonde. He said he had received my instructions and would carry them out as far as he was able to.

The 3rd Cavalry Division was at Thourout.

The French cavalry were very energetic on the 11th. Conneau's Cavalry Corps pushed back the German cavalry to the line Vermelles—Richebourg—Vieille Chapelle. De Mitry's Cavalry Corps assembled and drove the German cavalry back to the line of the Lawe at Vieille Chapelle and Estaires.

By the night of the 11th, the Cavalry Corps under Allenby had made good a great deal of ground to the north, and were halting between Wallon-Cappel (west of Hazebrouck) and Merville. Moving thence on the morning of the 12th, they carried out invaluable work during the subsequent two or three days. Allenby liberally interpreted his orders and made a magnificent sweep to the north and north-east, driving the enemy back all the way.

Of all the splendid work performed by the cavalry during the war, little can compare (in results achieved) with this advance. It was only surpassed by their immortal stand on the Wytschaete—Messines ridge on those ever-memorable days and nights of October 31st and November 1st.

By the evening of the 12th, Gough, with the 2nd Cavalry Division, had attacked and captured the Mont des Cats position, which was a strategic point of great importance lying six miles north-east of Hazebrouck. There was great opposition by the enemy cavalry, which was supported by jäger and strong infantry detachments; but Gough carried all before him in fine style.

The 1st Division under de Lisle halted before Merris, after severe fighting which drove the enemy back many miles.

On the 13th, the cavalry made a further great advance, driving the enemy before them, and on the evening reached the line Mont Noir—Boeschepe—Berthen. The

position of Mont Noir was vigorously defended by the Germans, but they were finally driven out by the 2nd Cavalry Division under Gough, who handled his troops with great skill and determination.

On the 14th, the 1st Cavalry Division reached the area Dranoutre—Messines and pushed advanced detachments to Warneton. The 2nd Division moved to the Kemmel—Wytschaete area, sending advanced detachments to Werwick.

I sent instructions to Allenby to make a strong reconnaissance of the Lys from Estaires to Menin on the 15th, and report the result as quickly as possible to me at the Headquarters of the 3rd Corps.

Late at night on the 12th, the 3rd Corps (4th and 6th Divisions and 19th Brigade) moved to the area east and south of Hazebrouck. The infantry were moved in motor omnibuses.

On this day General Headquarters were moved from Abbeville to St. Omer. On my way there I went to Hazebrouck to see the Commander of the 3rd Corps. Pulteney is a very old friend and comrade of mine, to whom I should like to devote a few lines of this story.

The keenest of soldiers from his early youth, he was Adjutant of his battalion of the Scots Guards. Thence he sought service in Africa, where he did excellent work, although he suffered severely from the climate.



I had the good fortune to be closely associated with him in the South African War, and there had experience of his fine qualities as a soldier and leader of men. I was delighted to find him with me as one of the three Corps Commanders who fought with the First Expeditionary Force sent to France.

Throughout my period of Commander-in-Chief he wholly justified the estimate which I had formed of his capacity and capability in the field. He enjoyed the full confidence of the officers and men who served under him. Possessed of iron nerve and indomitable courage, he remained imperturbable and unmoved in face of the most difficult and precarious situations. No matter how arduous the task imposed upon him he never made difficulties, but always carried out the *rôle* assigned to him with energy and skill. It had been my hope to see him in command of an Army, for which I feel sure he was thoroughly qualified; but my withdrawal from France prevented my carrying out my intentions with regard to him.

His conduct of the operations which I am just about to describe was characterised by his customary skill, boldness and decision. The great results which accrued from the First Battle of Ypres may be fairly traced back to his initial leading of the 3rd Corps in the series of successful advances which were the most prominent and important amongst the opening phases of that great combat.

On reaching Hazebrouck, about 4 p.m. on the 13th, I was told that the 3rd Corps was engaged with the enemy some miles east of the town. Repairing with all speed in that direction I came up with the rear of the 6th Division, which had been heavily engaged almost up to that moment, but now was preparing to advance. My car got hopelessly blocked amidst ammunition wagons and all manner of traffic, and in trying to extricate it we found ourselves badly bogged in a ploughed field.

Leaving the motor to struggle back, I tried to see what was going on from some high ground close by. Rain was falling heavily, and the atmosphere was foggy and misty. I watched as best I could for some little time what was going forward, until I felt assured that the tide of battle was flowing very favourably for us. I then got back as quickly as possible to Headquarters at St. Omer, where reports were awaiting me. I learnt that the town had been heavily bombed by hostile aircraft during the day. Much damage was done to buildings, and several soldiers and civilians had been killed and wounded. It was a somewhat unpleasant welcome for us, but the effect of it was completely wiped out by the news I received from Pulteney of the victory he had attained.

The enemy opposed to him consisted of one or two Divisions of cavalry, at least a Division of infantry (19th Corps) and several jäger battalions. Pulteney found them posted in a strong position covering Bailleul, with their left resting on Bleu (close to Vieux Berquin) and their right on Berthen. The British attack opened at 1.30

p.m., and by nightfall the 6th Division had captured Bailleul and Meteren, whilst the 4th Division captured and occupied a strong position facing east one mile to the north of the 6th Division.

This was an excellent day's work performed by the 3rd Corps; and the captured ground was of great value in the subsequent operations.

About noon on the 14th, the 3rd Corps continued the advance, and after some considerable fighting secured, by 7 p.m., the line Bleu—east of Bailleul—Neuve Église.

On the 15th I directed Pulteney to make good the River Lys between Armentières and Saily-sur-la-Lys, and endeavour to gain touch with the 2nd Corps.

By nightfall the 3rd Corps had made the line Saily-Nieppe.

Between the 11th and the 15th, the 4th Corps under Rawlinson was constantly engaged in assisting and covering the retreat of the Belgian Army. During this time the German forces from Antwerp were concentrating westwards in ever-increasing strength. The 7th Division under Capper retired successively from Ghent to Aeltre, thence to Thielt, from Thielt to Roulers, and from Roulers to the south and east of Ypres.

The 3rd Cavalry Division under Byng was at Thourout on the 11th, at Roulers on the 12th, at Ypres

on the 13th, and on the 14th connected up with Gough's 2nd Cavalry Division in front of Kemmel, which position the two Cavalry Divisions captured and secured.

On the 15th the 7th Division was east of Ypres, with the 3rd Cavalry Division well out in advance of them in the direction of Menin and Courtrai.

The capture of the high ground about Kemmel proved to be of the utmost importance to us throughout the Battle of Ypres.

On the 12th the Belgian Army assembled in the area Ostend—Dixmude—Furnes—Nieuport, but on the 15th withdrew entirely behind the Yser to the north of Ypres.

The French Naval Division and other troops which had been covering the Belgian retreat were at Dixmude and Nieuport. A French Territorial Division from Cassel had been moved to Ypres.

On the 14th it was reported that about 10,000 German troops from Antwerp were moving on Bruges and Roulers, and that another German Division from Antwerp had reached Courtrai.

On the 15th, the enemy strengthened their line on the Lys, where part of the 19th and 12th German Corps were reported to be with their right on Menin, and, finally, the Germans were said to be advancing in four columns to the line Ghistelles—Roulers.

I now turn to the operations of the 2nd Corps, which, it will be remembered, was on the right of the British forces to the east of Béthune.

I visited Smith-Dorrien at his Headquarters almost every day between the 11th and the 15th. On each occasion I was more and more impressed by the exceptionally difficult nature of the country in this part of our field of operations.

If we draw a line on the map starting from Lens on the south and following north through Liévin, La Bassée, Fromelles, Armentières, almost to the valley of the River Douveon the north, the whole *terrain* for several miles to the east and west of that line strongly resembles the English Black Country. North of Liévin the ground is very flat, whilst mining works, slag heaps, factories and mining villages completely cover the surface in all directions.

There is a large mining population whose tenements (sometimes single houses, sometimes separate rows or cottages) cover the whole area. There are also towns of some size, such as Béthune, Noeux-les-Mines, Nieppe, and Armentières.

The ground, moreover, was of such a character as to render effective artillery support to an infantry attack most difficult. The roads were rough, narrow, badly paved, and very slippery in wet weather, which caused movements by motor to be a work of time and difficulty, particularly in the case of the heavy motor

transport passing between the troops and their supply depôts. This marked defect in the roads applied, however, to the whole area over which the British operations extended.

After some severe fighting, particularly by the 5th Division, the 2nd Corps reached the line Annequin—Pont Fixe—Festubert—Vieille Chapelle—Fosse on the night of the 12th.

On my way to Hazebrouck on the 13th, I saw Smith-Dorrien for a short time. He was holding his own, and during the day his left (3rd Division) made good progress, reaching Pont du Hem close to Laventie.

The French cavalry, which had been operating in advance of the 2nd Corps, had drawn back to the northern flank of the latter and were at Pont Rigneul. For some days subsequently they held the ground and kept up connection between our 2nd and 3rd Corps.

On the afternoon of the 14th, I again visited Smith-Dorrien at Béthune. He was in one of those fits of deep depression which unfortunately visited him frequently. He complained that the 2nd Corps had never got over what he described as the "shock" of Le Cateau, and that the officers sent out to him to replace his tremendous losses in officers were untrained and inexperienced; and, lastly, he expressed himself convinced that there was no great fighting spirit throughout the troops he commanded.

I told him that I thought he greatly exaggerated these disabilities. I pointed out that the cavalry, the 4th Division and the 19th Brigade were all just as heavily engaged at Le Cateau as the 2nd Corps, but that their spirit and condition, as I had seen for myself the day before, were excellent.

Even if, as I consider, his point of view was needlessly pessimistic, Smith-Dorrien was certainly confronted with a difficult task. He was on a very extended front, and the situation undoubtedly demanded skilful handling and great determination.

I arranged with Foch that the French should extend their line north, up to the line of the La Bassée canal. When this was done, the Commander of the 2nd Corps was able to shorten his line and keep one of his brigades back in reserve.

On this day General Hubert Hamilton, commanding the 3rd Division, was killed by a shell. His loss was deeply felt by his Division, who had the utmost confidence in him.

Hubert Hamilton was an old friend of mine, and it grieved me much to lose him. He was a fine soldier, possessing a most attractive nature, and I do not think he can have had an enemy in the world. I have always looked back with admiration to his leading of the 3rd Division in that critical period of the war.

I conclude this chapter with the arrival of the last detachment of the 1st Corps at St. Omer from the Aisne.

There to the last they maintained the fine fighting record which they had earned, for on the 11th—shortly before their departure—they once again gallantly repulsed a heavy German attack with great loss to the enemy.

On the night of the 11th, the 2nd Division and 16th Brigade had been withdrawn from the trenches and had begun entraining *en route* for St. Omer, being followed shortly by the remainder of the 1st Corps.

The following Order of the Day was issued to the troops on October 16<sup>th</sup> :

"SPECIAL ORDER OF THE DAY.

"General Headquarters,  
"October 16th, 1914.

"1. Having for 25 days successfully held the line of the River Aisne between Soissons and Villers against the most desperate endeavours of the enemy to break through, that memorable battle has now been brought to a conclusion, so far as the British Forces are concerned, by the operation which has once more placed us on the left flank of the Allied Armies.

"2. At the close of this important phase of the campaign, I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation of the services performed throughout this trying period by the officers, non-commissioned officers and men of the British Field Forces in France.

"3. Throughout nearly the whole of those 25 days a most powerful and continuous fire of artillery, from



guns of a calibre never used before in field operations, covered and supported desperate infantry attacks made in the greatest strength and directed at all hours of the day and night on your positions.

"Although you were thus denied adequate rest and suffered great losses, in no case did the enemy attain the slightest success, but was invariably thrown back with immense loss.

"4. The powerful endurance of the troops was further greatly taxed by the cold and wet weather which prevailed during the greater part of the time.

"5. Paragraph 2 of the Special Order of the Day, August 22nd, ran as follows :

*'All the regiments comprising the Expeditionary Force bear on their colours emblems and names which constantly remind them of glorious victories achieved by them in the past. I have the most complete confidence that those regiments, as they stand to-day in close proximity to the enemy, will not only uphold the magnificent traditions of former days, but will add fresh laurels to their standards.'*

"I cannot convey what I feel with regard to the conduct of the troops under my command better than by expressing my conviction that they have justified that confidence well and nobly.

"6. That confidence is everywhere endorsed by their fellow-countrymen; and, whatever may be before the British Army in France, I am sure they will continue to follow the same, glorious path till final and complete victory is attained.

(Signed) "J. D. P. FRENCH, Field Marshal,  
"Commander-in-Chief, The British Army in the Field."