

1914, by John French, *Viscount of Ypres*

CHAPTER X

THE BATTLE OF YPRES

First Phase, October 15th to October 26th

Before continuing my narrative, which has now reached the opening stages of the First Battle of Ypres, let us consider what were the points at issue in this grave crisis in the history of the world. What were the stakes for which we were playing?

Let us suppose that from October 1914 up to the end of the war, the German right flank had been established at Dieppe, instead of at Nieuport. The enemy would have been in occupation of the whole of the Department of the Pas de Calais, including the seaports of Dieppe, Boulogne, Calais and Dunkirk.

How then would it have fared with the British Empire?

Discussing the question of the Channel tunnel, at a meeting of the Council of Imperial Defence, in May 1914, I suggested the possibility of submarines being despatched in sections by rail to certain ports and there assembled. The expert reply was that this would be quite impracticable. How has the experience of the war borne out this dictum?

It is as certain as anything can be, that, in the circumstances I have supposed, the Channel ports would soon have been full to overflowing with these craft, which, with such bases of operations, would have rendered the Channel a veritable *mare clausum*, so far as any attempt by our Navy to prevent invasion were concerned.

If, then, Napoleon entertained high hopes of success when he concentrated an army at Boulogne in 1805 for the invasion of this country, surely the Germans, in such circumstances as I have described, would have regarded such an enterprise with still greater confidence. And they would have been justified in so doing.

Then, as to aircraft. An examination of the map will show that London would be within about half the aircraft range of the German aerodromes as they existed if these latter were moved to Calais and its neighbourhood. Let those who have had experience of the full effect of air raids on London during the war judge what this might have meant. Had the western Channel ports been in German occupation, the horrors of these air raids would have been multiplied a hundredfold.

It is only necessary to add that, during the war, heavy artillery succeeded in making effective practice at ranges greater than the distance between Calais and Dover.

I think it is reasonable to deduce from this argument that the stakes for which we were playing at the great Battle of Ypres were nothing less than the safety, indeed, the very existence, of the British Empire.

Now, the Germans had two distinct opportunities of bringing about such a situation as I have contemplated :

(1) To reinforce their right much sooner than they did—even though, by so doing, they had to make slight and unimportant sacrifices elsewhere—and to take up a line of entrenchments resting on the sea at Dieppe, whence they could have run their trenches east and joined up with their main line before de Castelnau's flank movement could possibly have developed.

(2) By successfully attacking the British and French forces to the east of Ypres, and driving them back to the sea.

This latter alternative, as we know, is what they actually attempted; which mighty effort, together with our successful and prolonged resistance, constituted the First Battle of Ypres.

No one who has done me the honour of reading this book so far can suppose that I did not realise this danger.

I am free to confess, however, that, on October 15th, 1914, the day upon which I date the opening of the Battle of Ypres, I thought that the danger was past. I believed that the enemy had exhausted his strength in

the great bid he had made to smash our armies on the Marne and to capture Paris. The fine successes gained by the cavalry and the 3rd Corps, narrated in the last chapter, did much to confirm these impressions on my mind.

I could not bring myself to suppose for one moment that, with such resources as the Germans afterwards showed that they had at this time in reserve, they could have let slip such an opportunity as we afforded them by our long delay on the Aisne and our perilous disregard of the danger in the north. One of their punishments will be the corroding contemplation of the "ifs" and "buts" of their stupendous gamble.

In my inmost heart, I did not expect I should have to fight a great defensive battle. All my dispositions were made with the idea of carrying out effectively the combined offensive which, as narrated in the last chapter, was concerted between Foch and myself.

There was only one reservation in my mind, and that concerned the danger of leaving a gap anywhere in our long line, or of failing to give a sufficiently close support to the weary but most gallant Army of the King of the Belgians. As will presently be shown, I had to run a terrible risk to safeguard against this danger, but I hold that the risk was justified.

Many of Napoleon's great campaigns developed in a totally unexpected manner, quite different to his original conception, but he always claimed that his constant

success was due to the initial correct direction and impulse which he always imparted to his armies. Tolstoy states that the only directions he gave at Borodino, three in number, were never carried out, and could never, as the battle developed, have been carried out. I have not verified the great Russian novelist's statement, but it may well be true. History relates that in the Jena campaign of 1806, Napoleon, in three days, made three erroneous calculations of the Prussians' doings.

"On the 10th," says Hamley, in his "Operations of War," "he thought Hohenlohe was about to attack him; on the 10th also he judged that the Prussians were concentrating on Gera; and on the 13th he mistook Hohenlohe's army for the entire Prussian force. Still, his plan, made on these suppositions, was in the main quite suitable to the actual circumstances. And this, as is mostly the case, was owing *to the right direction* given to the movements *at the outset*. The preliminary conditions of a campaign seldom offer more than three or four alternatives; an attack by the centre or either flank, or some combination of these. If the enemy has made such false dispositions as to render one of these alternatives decidedly the best, the General who has the faculty of choosing it thereby provides in the best possible way for all subsequent contingencies. *A right impulse* once given to an army, it is in a position to turn events not calculated on, or miscalculated, to advantage."

As a humble but life-long disciple of this great master of war, I venture to make the same claim for the operations now about to be discussed.

The designation of the place where any great battle has taken place, and the limits of time within which it has lasted, were formerly much more easily defined than now.

In my first dispatch reporting the details of the Battle of Ypres, I think it was described as "The Battle of Ypres-Armentières," and, strictly speaking, that really would have been more correct.

I have mentioned this in order to draw attention to the fact that, although the most critical point throughout this living line of battle was east of the town of Ypres, yet the battle which was given that name was fought on a front of many miles, extending from the sea at Nieuport to the Béthune—Lille canal. Continuous and heavy fighting went on for days all along this line.

At the beginning of the operations which I am about to narrate, my plans were based generally on the agreement which I had come to with Foch on the 10th instant. Nothing had occurred, so far, to raise any great doubts in my mind as to the possibility of prosecuting the offensive which we had arranged to put in movement. At the time of the arrival of the 1st Corps, a few days later, increasing opposition had made itself felt all along the Allied front in the north, and reports reached us of a powerful offensive by the enemy

towards Ypres and the Yser. In consequence of this, my appreciation of the situation was that I should have to make a very momentous decision between two most perilous alternatives.

But, for the moment, at any rate, I felt complete confidence. I met the Corps Commanders at Hazebrouck, and, in accordance with the plans which Foch and I had agreed upon, directed them as follows :

The 2nd Corps on the right was ordered to continue in its present direction, making ground to the east.

The 3rd Corps was to advance and make good the River Lys between Armentières and Saily-sur-Lys, and to endeavour to gain touch with the 2nd Corps.

The cavalry under Allenby were to make good the river towards Menin, and then, if possible, sweep round to the north and north-east.

Rawlinson was to move with his right on Courtrai, keeping generally level with the 3rd Corps in the subsequent advance, should that prove possible; his cavalry under Byng were to move to the north of him.

I had told Rawlinson that, whilst conforming to the general move east, he must keep an eye on the enemy's detachments known to be at Bruges and Roulers. I told him I would deal with these later by means of the 1st Corps, but for the moment his left required careful watching.

In carrying out these orders some progress was made, and the troops reached the following lines by midnight :

- 2nd Corps.—Givenchy-les-La Bassée—Pont du Hem.
- 3rd Corps.—Neighbourhood of Sailly.

The remaining parts of the line were much in the same position as before.

On the 16th I went out to see the cavalry. The day was wet and misty, and it was almost impossible to get artillery targets.

The 1st and 2nd Cavalry Divisions fought all day to gain the passage of the Lys from Warneton to Comines, but without success.

The 2nd Cavalry Division gained a footing in Warneton, but was counter-attacked and driven out in the evening. Before I left Allenby, he told me he had great hopes of succeeding the next day. I remember watching some of this fighting from an artillery observation post established in a very roughly constructed hay-loft, through the rotten floor of which we were nearly precipitated some twenty feet to the ground.

On my way back I came to the Headquarters of the 3rd Corps. They were getting on fairly well and had made some progress, but they had not yet taken Armentières.

On this day the 2nd Corps was able to move forward with slight opposition to the line Givenchy—north-west of Aubers.

Of the 4th Corps, the 7th Division occupied the line Houthem-Gheluvelt-St. Julien, in touch with German outposts.

The 3rd Cavalry Division moved towards Roulers, and was slightly engaged with the enemy in the forest of Houthulst. In the evening they occupied the line Zonnebeke-Westroosebeke.

Reports pointed to an increasing hostile advance centred on Thourout.

My ideas as to an earnest offensive on our part were so far modified by what I had seen and heard, that I sent Wilson to Foch expressing my conviction that we could not hope to advance east on the lines which we had discussed on the 10th until our left was cleared. An offensive on that flank was the only move open to us. This, if successful, would drive the enemy back from Bruges, and possibly clear Ghent. I was anxious to know what support Foch could give me in the north. I told Wilson to assure Foch that the 2nd and 3rd Corps, as well as the cavalry, would continue their endeavour to make headway east, so far as circumstances permitted.

Foch replied that he had already two Territorial Divisions and two Cavalry Divisions, besides some six to seven thousand Marines, on the Yser. He could have

another Regular Division there either by the 22nd or the 23rd, and he would then advance with all the forces at his disposal, in support of my left, and clear the country as far as Ostend and Bruges.

By the night of the 18th the 3rd Corps had captured Bois Grenier and Armentières, and were on the line Radinghem—Prêmesques—Houplines, after an excellent advance for which Pulteney deserved great credit.

On the left of the 2nd Corps the 3rd Division had made some advance to the line Lorgies—Herlies. The 5th Division on the right was up against La Bassée, but could make no further headway. It was a most formidable stronghold.

The cavalry were watching the River Lys to Menin.

As to the 4th Corps, doubtless Rawlinson was restricted by the warning I had given him, and was naturally somewhat anxious about his left flank. His troops made but little progress towards the objective assigned to them.

I had good reasons to think that Menin was very weakly occupied on the 17th, and orders were sent to Rawlinson to move on and attack that place on the 18th. He did not, however, march. The embargo I had laid upon him as to his left flank was, perhaps, a sufficient justification; but I have always regretted that the cavalry did not get this very necessary support on the

18th, which might possibly have secured to us the line of the Lys from Menin upwards.

I do not impute blame for this to the commander of the 4th Corps. Such instances of disregard of orders occur in every campaign. Only when the full history of the war is known, and all the cards are laid on the table, can a right judgment be formed.

Nothing impressed me so much with the increasing power and weight of the enemy's opposition as my own personal experience on the afternoon of the 18th, when I went into Armentières to try and study the situation with a view to estimating future possibilities. A good outlook was afforded from some high buildings on the eastern edge of this place. The town was being heavily shelled, and the way in which large buildings were being smashed and turned into ruins proved that projectiles of large calibre were falling, and that a considerable force of *heavy artillery* was, therefore, in action against the town. It was evident that powerful reinforcements were coming up to the enemy.

I recall this afternoon in Armentières very vividly. Armentières has a manufacturing population, and the day being Sunday, everyone was wearing his best clothes. The scenes in the streets were extraordinary. Some of the men seemed to have gone mad with either rage or fear. Women rushed to and fro, screaming, with babies in their arms.

Close to the look-out post where I was standing, a priest in his altar vestments dashed out of a church with the sacred vessels in his arms, and tore in panic down the street in front of me, followed by large numbers of his flock. A great deal of damage was done to the town, and there were many casualties amongst the civilians.

By October 19th, the 1st Corps under Haig was fully concentrated in the northern theatre.

The 2nd Division was in the area Poperinghe—Boeschepe—Steenvoorde, the 1st Division between St. Omer and Cassel.

On this day I had to take a very grave decision, and I shall try and recall the working of my mind at the time, and the manner in which the problem I had to solve presented itself to me.

On October 10th and 11th, when I commenced operations in the northern theatre with the British Forces, I was, as I have said, decidedly optimistic as to the possibility of carrying out a strong offensive eastwards. Foch was equally confident, and we both thought that our concerted plans promised well.

My reason for forming this opinion was, in the first place, based upon my talks with Foch, who had already been on the spot for several days. He had been able to form some estimate of the enemy's strength between Arras and the sea. He considered that the Germans were in no condition to stem a determined advance by us. Reports had reached me of large

transfers of German troops from this theatre to the Aisne and south of that river. Foch expressed himself as well satisfied with the progress already made by his own army, particularly the cavalry on his northern flank.

But I had other and more tangible reasons for hope and confidence. Between the 12th and the 15th, the cavalry and the 3rd Corps had gained important victories and made splendid advances. During these days it did not appear that Rawlinson in the north was ever heavily pressed. The 2nd Corps had made certain progress, though I have always thought, in regard to them, that more might have been done had they been directed with more determination and vigour.

The Germans themselves certainly thought so. We intercepted a wireless message sent by General von der Marwitz, Commanding the 4th German Cavalry Corps, who, in wiring to the Commander of the 6th German Army, commented upon the "weakness" of the 2nd Corps' attack, and the ease with which he had been able to withstand it.

After the 15th, however, the result of my own observations, and the reports I continued to receive of the enemy's constantly increasing strength all along our line, caused me anxiety and induced me to send the message I have mentioned to Foch.

I was far from satisfied with the situation in the north. Although no reports had reached us of any great

concentration of the enemy there, I had much reason to fear that troops were being moved east across Belgium to reinforce him. The French troops on the Yser were not numerous, and they included many Territorials, whilst the Belgians were completely tired out. On the right of the Belgians, as far as Menin, there were only the 3rd Cavalry and 7th Infantry Divisions, both of which stood in need of rest and refit.

Ours was a tremendously long line to guard with so few troops available. If the enemy broke through the left flank all the British would be turned, the Belgians and the French troops with them would be cut off and the sea-coast towns would be gone.

When I looked further south, the prospect was no better. The enemy was daily and almost hourly getting stronger in front of our line, which was held by the cavalry and by the 2nd and 3rd Corps. The endurance of these troops had been heavily taxed, and I had practically no reserves. Moreover, they were extended on a front much too wide for their numbers, especially north of the Lys.

Bad as a complete break through by the enemy in the north would have been, a wedge driven through our lines south of Menin would have entailed still more disastrous consequences.

In a message which I received from de Maud'huy on the 16th, he expressed great fear that the Germans were intent on attacking between us and finally separating us.

Had they accomplished this, the eventual alternatives before the British Army would have been to surrender or be driven into the sea.

I pondered long and deeply on the situation, and finally arrived at the following conclusion :

If the enemy's threats against Ypres and the Yser were not strongly met by a corresponding offensive move, then a break through at some point in that neighbourhood by the Germans was a practical certainty, and the seaboard would be theirs.

On the other hand, although from the south of Ypres to La Bassée the situation would remain very precarious, I conceived that it might be possible to hold on till support could arrive.

Since the solution of the problem, as presented to my mind, resolved itself into a balance of *certain disaster* against a disaster which, although much greater in degree, was still *not a certainty*, I determined to guard against the former; and on the evening of the 19th I sent for Sir Douglas Haig and gave him his instructions.

I explained the situation as clearly as possible, and showed him on the map where and how we thought the enemy's troops were distributed. I said that at the moment I did not think there was much more than the 3rd German Reserve Corps, with possibly one or two Divisions attached, between Ostend and Menin, but that all reports pointed to an early arrival of strong reinforcements from the centre and east of Belgium.

I pointed out to Haig how much importance I attached to the clearing of Ostend and Bruges before these reinforcements could arrive. I said I hoped that, with the assistance of the French and Belgian troops on the north, and Rawlinson on his right flank, he would be able to effect this object and perhaps, with luck, throw the enemy back on Ghent. I told him that this was what I particularly wanted to bring about, but that he would have to be guided by the course of events. I informed him of Wilson's visit to Foch on the 16th, and Foch's promise that he would strongly support us on the north.

Orders were then issued to the 1st Corps, of which the following is a summary :

"The 1st Corps will advance *via* Thourout with the object of capturing Bruges. If this is proved to be feasible and successful, every endeavour must be made to turn the enemy's left flank and drive him back to Ghent. The situation, however, is very uncertain, and in the first instance it is only possible to direct the 1st Corps with its right on the line Ypres—Roulers. Should the forces of the enemy, reported to be moving west between Iseghem and Courtrai, seriously menace the 4th Corps, it is left to the discretion of the Commander of the 1st Corps to lend this Corps such assistance as may be necessary."

It had been arranged by the Admiralty that some battleships were to be held in readiness at Dover, to co-

operate with our movements on the north coast should opportunity offer.

My advanced Headquarters were now established at Bailleul, and a long discussion I had there on the 19th with Pulteney and Smith-Dorrien showed that our front south of Menin was being still more severely pressed.

An attempt by the 4th Corps to advance on Menin ended in failure.

The Germans were also fairly active in the north. They pushed back de Mitry's French Cavalry Corps towards Staden and Zarren, and heavily attacked the Belgians at Nieuport, but our Allies held their ground well.

The events of the 20th showed still greater pressure by the enemy. The 3rd Cavalry Division was driven back to the line Zonnebeke—St. Julien—Pilkem by infantry and guns advancing from Roulers.

The centre of Allenby's Cavalry Corps fell back on Messines, which place was heavily shelled.

In order to cement the connection between the 2nd and 3rd Corps (now only maintained by Conneau's French cavalry) I sent the 19th Brigade to be placed at Pulteney's disposal.

Haig sent two battalions of the 4th Guards Brigade to support the centre of the 4th Corps between Byng and Capper.

On the 21st, all my worst forebodings as to the enemy's increasing strength were realised. Intercepted wireless messages established the certainty that the comparatively small German force which on the night of the 18th we judged to be between Ostend and Menin, was now reinforced by no less than four Corps, namely, the 21st, 22nd, 26th and 27th Reserve Corps. These Corps had been hastily formed, and were not composed of the best troops, They were also weak in numbers and artillery as compared with other Corps.

Although I looked for a great addition to the enemy's numbers within a few days from the 18th, the strength they actually reached astounded me. This, taken with the speed in which they appeared in the field, came like a veritable bolt from the blue.

My only comfort lay in the certainty that my direction of the 1st Corps to the north was sound and best calculated to meet these new and startling conditions.

All hope of any immediate offensive had now to be abandoned. It was simply "up to us" to hold on like grim death to our positions by hard, resolute fighting, until relief in some shape could come.

It may well be asked how I expected such relief to be afforded, and whence it could arrive. What hope could be justified in face of such overpowering odds?

As far as reinforcements went, all I had to look to was the Indian Corps, one Division of which (the Lahore) detrained on the 19th and the 20th at St. Omer, and was

now concentrating at Wallon-Cappel, west of Hazebrouck. A wire from Lord Kitchener on the 22nd offered me another Territorial Battalion to replace the London Scottish on the lines of communication, if I wished to use the latter at the front. I had also available the Oxfordshire Yeomanry Cavalry, which had been landed at Dunkirk.

These were all the British reserves which could possibly be available for some time. Doubtless, if we could keep our positions for two or three weeks, much larger reinforcements would be forthcoming. But, even so, it did not appear that there was any prospect, in the near future, of attaining definite results by an effective offensive.

Nevertheless, I remained hopeful and confident of the final result.

On the 23rd I issued the following special Order of the Day to the troops :

The Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief wishes once more to make known to the troops under his command how deeply he appreciates the bravery and endurance which they have again displayed since their arrival in the northern theatre. In circulating the official information which records the splendid victories of our Russian Allies, he would remind the troops that the enemy must before long withdraw troops to the East and relieve the tension on our front. He feels it is quite unnecessary to urge officers, non-commissioned officers

and men to make a determined effort and drive the enemy over the frontier.

(Signed) "H. WILSON, Major-Gen.,
"7.30 p.m. Sub-Chief."

This, then, was my great hope. It was to Russia and to the East that all eyes were turned at that time. Our Allies had scored a considerable success in that theatre.

With the failure of the second attack of the Central Powers upon Warsaw, we may take stock for a moment of Russia's achievement. Russia made no secret preparation for war, and the outbreak of hostilities had found her with her Army reorganisation incomplete and a serious shortage of equipment. She had to bring her men by slender communications many thousands of miles, but she was ready to strike a fortnight before Germany believed she could move. Her invasion of East Prussia had done much to relieve the strain in the West, and heavily she paid for her quixotry.

But, after Tannenberg, she made no mistakes. Von Hindenburg was enticed to the Niemen and then driven back to disaster at Augustovo; while in Galicia, Lemberg and all Eastern Galicia were won, and in two mighty battles three Austrian Armies were heavily beaten.

The Russian Generals showed that rarest of combinations — an omnipresent sense of a great strategic objective and a power of patiently biding their time and of temporarily relinquishing their objective

when prudence demanded. A commander less wise than the Grand Duke Nicholas would have battled desperately for Cracow, lost a million men, and at the end of the year have been further from it than in September. But as it was, the first great advance was promptly recalled when von Hindenburg threatened Warsaw, and the second was also abandoned when it was at the very gates of the city.

The first Battle of Warsaw and the Battle of Kazimirjev were strategically admirable; and the subsequent fighting, from Kozienice westward, showed the stubborn valour of the Russian soldier. Not less brilliant was the long retirement from the Warta. There was some blunder of timing in the fighting between Lodz and Lowicz, for which *Rennenkampf* was held responsible; but there was no flaw in the retreat to the Bzura or the holding of the river line.

The Grand Duke Nicholas proved that he possessed that highest of military gifts—the power of renunciation, of "cutting losses," of sacrificing the less essential for the more. We must remember that in all these first five months of war, the united strength of the Teutonic League outnumbered the Russians by at least half a million. Locally, as at the first Battle of Warsaw, the latter may have had the superiority; but in all the retreat from the Warta to the Bzura the Russian front was markedly inferior in weight of men to von Mackensen's forces. When we remember this, we can do justice not only to the excellence of the generalship, but

also to the stamina and courage of the rank and file. Let it be added that reports are unanimous as to the behaviour of the Russian troops at that time, their chivalry towards the foe, their good humour, their kindness towards each other and their devotion to their commanders.

In a decade the miracle of miracles had happened. Russia had found herself, and her Armies had become an expression of the national will. "There is as much difference," wrote one correspondent, "in organisation, *morale*, and efficiency between the armies which some of us saw in Manchuria ten years ago and which crumpled up before the Imperial Guards of Japan at the Battle of the Yalu, and the military machine that these past few weeks has been steadily and surely driving back the armies of Germany and Austria, as there was between the raw American recruits who stampeded at the Battle of the Bull Run in 1861 and the veterans who received the surrender of Lee at Appomattox."

If then I am asked upon what I based my hopes during October, 1914, that is my answer.

The actual fronts and positions of the opposing forces from Nieuport and the sea to La Bassée, on the night of October 21st, were, according to our latest and best information, as follows :

SUMMARY FROM RIGHT TO LEFT.

	<i>Front (approx.).</i>	<i>Attacked by</i>
2nd Corps	6 miles	7th Corps.
Conneau's Cavalry Corps	Filling gap, 1 mile.	19th Corps and part of 7th Corps.
3rd Corps and 19th Bgd.	12 miles.	
Cavalry Corps	4 miles	Part of 19th Corps and of 18th Corps.
4th Corps	6 miles	1 Division of 13th Corps and 27th Corps.
1st Corps	7 miles	26th Corps and part of 23rd Corps.
Territorials, de Mitry's Cav. Corps, Belgians, and French Marines.	20 miles	23rd Corps, 22nd and 3rd Reserve Corps, and Ersatz Division.

On October 21st the 1st Corps came into line, and after hard fighting held at night the line Zonnebeke—Langemarck—Bixschoote, the left of the 1st Division being on the Yser Canal.

Some confusion and friction were caused by the withdrawal of de Mitry's Cavalry Corps to the west bank of the canal, thus uncovering the flank of the 1st Corps, who were also considerably delayed in their advance by French Territorial troops blocking the road. In spite of this, however, the 1st Corps delivered some powerful attacks with the bayonet, and in the afternoon the artillery of the Corps was in action for a long time against retreating hostile masses. They were splendid targets for one brigade in particular, which did tremendous execution.

The inevitable evils of divided command are clearly shown when Allied troops are mixed, and the limits of control cannot be properly defined. As will appear later, I made the most strenuous attempts to minimise this very serious drawback, either until rectified or considerably reduced by arrangements between the two Governments, but all in vain. I could get no hearing.

I was so strongly impressed with the danger of the confusion and congestion which the divided command

was causing in the north, that I went myself on the evening of the 21st to Ypres, where I was met by Haig, Rawlinson, de Mitry, and Bidon (who commanded a French Territorial Division). Arrangements were there made by which the town was to be at once cleared of the French troops, and the left flank of the 1st Corps properly covered.

On the 21st I received a visit from General Joffre, who told me he was at once bringing up the 9th French Army Corps to Ypres.

Two battalions of the Lahore Division were sent at night in motor omnibuses to Wulverghem, to come under Allenby's orders in support of the cavalry.

The 3rd Cavalry Division was moved from the left to the right of the 7th Division to be in a position to assist Allenby's Cavalry Corps, which was being hard pressed on the left at Zonnebeke.

A fine piece of work was done by the 4th Division under Wilson on the morning of the 21st. The Germans had advanced and captured Le Gheer. The 4th Division retook it by a brilliant counter-attack and secured 200 prisoners.

I fix the close of the first phase of the Battle of Ypres as the night of October 26th. By the morning of the 27th the 9th French Corps had settled down in the trenches which they had taken over from the 1st Corps in the northern part of the Ypres salient.

Speaking generally, it may be said that, in the last days of this, the opening period of the battle, the northern portion of our line progressed slowly but surely, very heavy losses being inflicted on the enemy and many prisoners were captured.

To the south, however, between Zonnebeke and the La Bassée, a certain amount of ground was lost, but troops held staunchly to their positions, and there was never any break of a serious nature made in the line.

On the 22nd, the enemy, who had thrown a number of pontoon bridges across the Lys opposite the Cavalry Corps, appeared to be massing troops against that part of our line. The Lahore Division having then reached Bailleul, I sent Egerton's Brigade to support the cavalry. I found there was no chance of getting the Meerut Division for some time to come, as they were being hopelessly delayed at Marseilles and Orleans.

At midnight on the 22nd both the 2nd and 3rd Corps Commanders were very anxious about their positions, and I therefore despatched the Lahore Division to Estaires, from which point it could support either Corps in case of urgent necessity.

On the 24th I paid a visit to General d'Urbal at Poperinghe. He had come to command the northern French Army. We discussed the situation together, and he seemed hopeful as to future possibilities.

D'Urbal impressed me as a man of striking personality. In figure and bearing he reminded me of the old Murat

type of French *beau sabreur*. All his regimental service was passed in the cavalry. I was a great deal associated with him in the operations at Ypres and afterwards, when he commanded the French troops on the Arras front, and I can testify to his remarkable powers of command, his fine courage and his extraordinary tenacity. We were together in many critical situations, and I have passed some anxious hours in his company; but I never knew him other than helpful in the highest degree. Nothing ever ruffled the calmness of his demeanour, or prevented him from exercising that deliberate and well-weighed judgment which was a remarkable feature of his truly soldierlike character.

Dawnay came back from the 1st Corps on this night, and told me that late on the previous day the enemy had delivered a succession of counter-attacks against the front of the 2nd Division just as they were being relieved. The German infantry came on in dense columns singing "The Watch on the Rhine." They were simply mown down by our artillery and rifle fire. The ground was a veritable shambles, and the 1st Corps estimated that in the last three or four days they had put at least 8,000 Germans *hors-de-combat*.

Foch, with whom I had a long interview at Cassel on the morning of the 25th, appeared to be quite hopeful and sanguine about the situation on the canal north of Ypres. He told me that another French regular Division was to be brought up on either flank at Nieuport and Ypres, and he proposed later to move Conneau from

the neighbourhood of Béthune. I told him I could hardly do without Conneau for the moment, and he agreed to leave him as long as I wanted him.

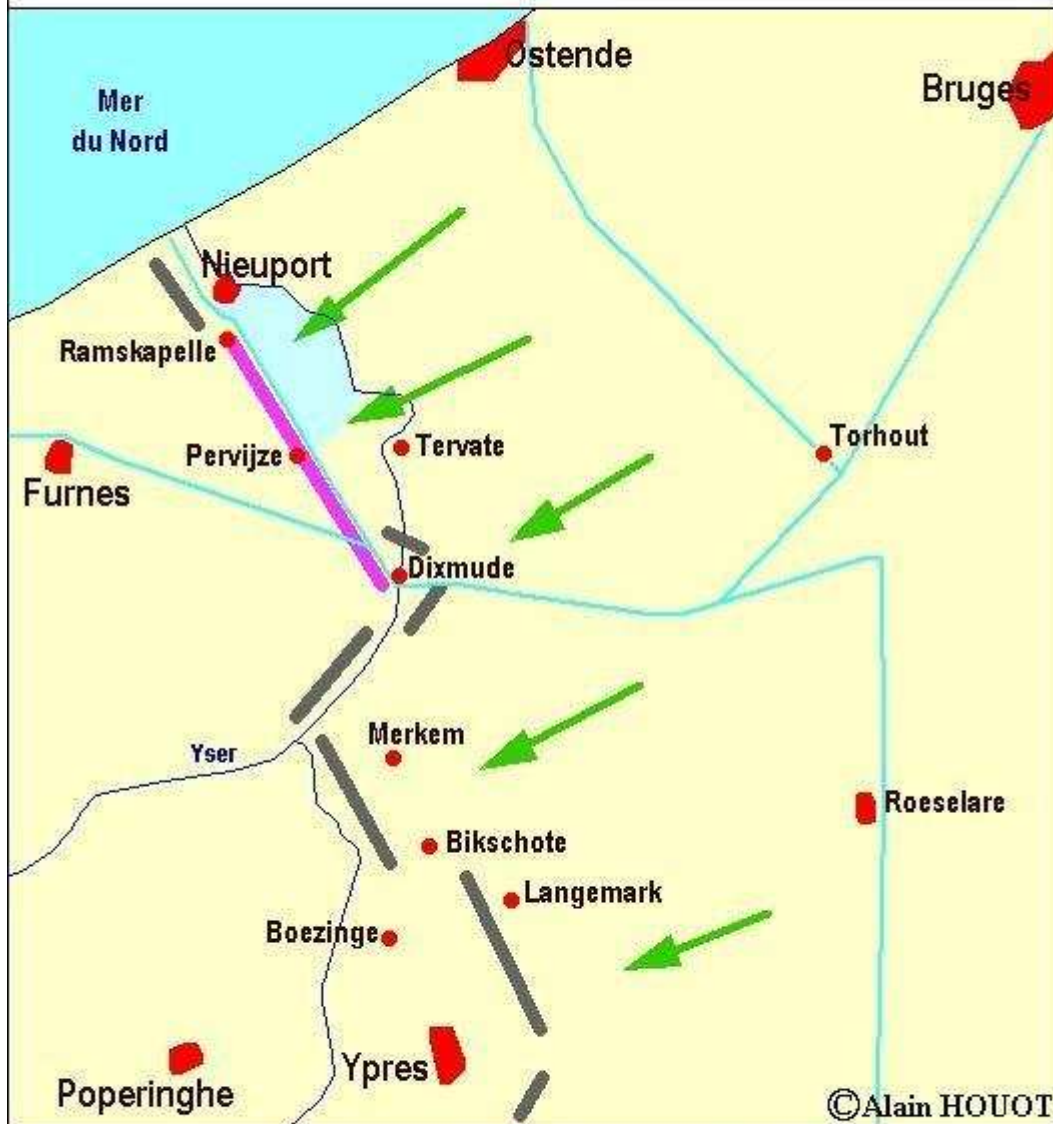
It is interesting to recall that General Conneau was once a cadet at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich. He proved himself throughout the war to be a distinguished and able cavalry leader.

The first phase of the Battle of Ypres may be briefly summarised as the conclusion of the successive attempts, begun a month previously, to effect a great turning movement round the German right flank. The operations up to the night of the 26th certainly failed in their original intention of clearing the coast-line and driving the enemy from Bruges and Ghent, but they succeeded in establishing a line to the sea which, if it could be held, brought the Germans face to face with the challenge: "Thus far shalt thou go and no farther."

What this meant to them is proved by the desperate but abortive attempts they made to break through in the second phase of the battle.

La Bataille de l'Yser

16 - 31 octobre 1914



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- Forces françaises
- Forces belges
- Offensives allemandes
- canaux
- zones inondées