

THE TIMES, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 1915.

THE ALLIES' ADVANCE.

BRITISH RÔLE IN THE FIGHTING.

HOOGE AND LOOS.

THE GREAT MOVE IN CHAMPAGNE.

SPECIAL ACCOUNT.

By JOHN BUCHAN.

BRITISH HEADQUARTERS, SEPT. 26.

It is possible to-day to walk in a trench from the North Sea to the Alps. If some misguided pilgrim, with the proper passes, had attempted it, he would have discovered last Friday, wherever he happened to find himself, a certain air of expectancy and preparation. And on Saturday the odds were that he would have been entangled in an attack. For on that morning began what may well prove to be the battle on the longest continuous line in the world's history.

We do not yet know the strategic plan. But the summer's war has brought certain military facts into high relief, and one is the futility of attacks on a narrow front. You may pierce the enemy's line on a front of several miles, as the Allies did in May at Festubert and in Artois. But the front closes up before you and hardens like asphalt, and what began as a breach ends as an ordinary salient. You have driven in a wedge, but you are no farther forward. An attack on a narrow front enables the enemy to bring up reserves of men and guns and close the port. A gap is no use unless you have room to manoeuvre in it, and so widen it.

But if you can tear a great rent in the enemy's line—20 or 30 miles wide—then you prevent him repairing the damage in time, and with luck you may roll up the ragged edges and force the whole front to retreat. That was what von Mackensen did on the Dunajec in the first days of May. He broke Radko Dmitrieff on a 40-mile front, and there was no halting till Galicia was lost.

morning we took Loos and pressed eastward towards the Cité St. Auguste, which is the northern suburb of Lens.

Between St. Auguste and Loos is a hillock marked 70 metres in the map, a trifling rise, but a position of vital importance in that flat country. By the evening we held Hill 70, and were in the western suburbs of Hulluch. It was the most considerable British advance since the war of entrenchments began, for we had progressed two and a half miles on a front of five.

South of us the French were busy in their old cockpit of Artois. Their artillery "preparation" was brilliant. But the line from Souchez to the Labyrinth is desperately strong, as the Army of Artois learned in May and June, and no such advance was possible as that of the British at Loos. They won the front trenches and held them, but by Saturday evening they had still heavy defences to overcome.

On Saturday every one in the pauses of his own business was asking French officers of his acquaintance for news from Champagne.

It came, and it was good. Champagne is in a special sense the Holy Land of French arms. There Theodoric broke the hosts of Attila. From the fringes of the land Joan of Arc came to the rescue of her country. There Valmy, the crucial battle of the Revolution, was won. There Langle de Cary fought one of the determining actions of the Battle of the Marne, when he checked the assault of the Wurtembergers on the French right centre. There, too, in March, General von Einem first felt the terrors of a French bombardment, and lost the bulk of the first line of the Guard.

Every Frenchman looked on the chalky downs around the Camp of Attila as a place of destiny for his country, for there it had long been prophesied that the great battle of the future would be fought. It was as if a British Fleet were fighting again in the waters off Cape Trafalgar.

On Saturday we learned that on a wide front in Champagne much ground had been won, and that subsidiary operations had done well.

THE GERMAN PRISONERS.

This morning at a railway station behind the front I saw some 1,400 German prisoners. Prisoners are always to me the most melancholy sight on earth; I think I would rather look on the dead on a battlefield; for men who have lost their freedom and are subject to an alien will seem, while retaining life, to have dropped out of the ranks of humanity. But these men had nothing pitiful in their air. They were very dirty and very tired, for they had marched many miles since daybreak. A few had wounds which troubled them, and all were eager for the water which some Territorials distributed. They were divided up into sections of 50 by their own non-commissioned officers and given a meal. As they filled that dusty station yard a train passed, and the amazed face of a French guard projected itself. With a joyful grin he shouted, "Ah! you Boches," and was whisked into the distance, still muttering.

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A CHANGE OF WIND.

The weather in the beginning of last week was of the perfect autumn kind, with the clear cool days that an east wind brings. In the evening the smoke from the little fires of field refuse cloaked the land like a sea fog. But on Friday the wind moved to the west, and a Scots mist settled on the countryside.

All along the front the roads were full of returning gun teams and long files of ammunition wagons. The general bombardment, which had now continued for some weeks, was still in progress, and the Germans were replying. There was a violent cannonade in Artois, and the dust-heap that once was Ypres was shelled most of the day and the adjacent roads sprayed with shrapnel. Everywhere one found an atmosphere of tension and expectancy. Then just before midnight the great guns began.

From 30 miles off it sounded like the roll of giant drums. There was no cessation, but sometimes a crescendo, when it had the volume of thunder near at hand. It seemed to last all night, and about 7 in the morning it died, and for two hours there was a lull. A start

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The prisoners were of good physique, far better than those I had seen before. They included several boys and a fair number of elderly men with the black and gold button of the Landsturm on their caps, but most were stout young fellows of the countryman type. The only townsman I talked to had been a salesman in a London shop.

There was no surliness or shyness about them. They did as they were bid with alacrity, and one who blundered was told by his sergeant to remember that he was a German and must show the English how to behave. Most seemed to be in good spirits in spite of their fatigue. Some of the young gunners were prepared to argue about strategy and attribute the British success to our following German models. One made jokes about Scottish soldiers and Highland veterans.

An army made up of such materials is not to be treated lightly. But it was impossible to keep from wondering whether the martial spirit of these men was on a level with their physique and obvious good training. Whole companies of them had been "rounded up." Scarcely one in 50 had any sort of wound. They seemed

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Presently news began to come in. Every section of the British line was engaged, but the two chief advances were at Hooge and beyond Vermelles. At Hooge the action of August 6 had given us the crater north of the Menin road, but the Germans held the Bellewaarde lake and the château, and south of the road they had an awkward *fortin* at a corner of Sanctuary Wood, which in August had enfiladed our right. At 5 o'clock our bombardment began, and at 6 we fired a mine south of the road. We carried the front trenches and took the Sanctuary Wood fortress, but were unable to hold the Bellewaarde lake beyond the afternoon.

THE CAPTURE OF LOOS.

But the big struggle was just north of Lens. The country, as seen from one of the numerous slag-heaps to the west, is a dead flat plain, scarred with roads, and studded with the headgear of collieries and clusters of mean little red houses. In the chalky soil the roads and the trench networks show up with extraordinary sharpness. The British lines covered Vermelles and Grenay, and a hundred yards beyond lay the Germans from the La Bassée position south to their stronghold at Souchez. Their lines were the defence of Lens, which in turn was the defence of Lille.

The tactical details of this battle and the achievements of the battalions are still to come. The main facts are that on the Saturday morning we assaulted the front Hullech-Loos, while the troops north of the Canal also attacked to divert German reinforcements. Early in the

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An army made up of such materials is not to be treated lightly. But it was impossible to keep from wondering whether the martial spirit of these men was on a level with their physique and obvious good training. Whole companies of them had been "rounded up." Scarcely one in 50 had any sort of wound. They seemed actually relieved to be prisoners, so as to be out of the pandemonium. It is difficult to conceive of British or French troops accepting the position quite in this way.

There was another curious point about them. The majority had the light eyes and high cheekbones of one type of Slav. With the flat forage caps they had almost the air of Russian troops. Clearly these men from the fringes of Germany's ill-assorted Empire were not inspired with any passionate belief in *Germanenthum* or any virulent antipathy to their opponents.

For Germany to succeed she must not only keep her armies at full strength, but she must preserve at white-heat the old fanatical unyielding spirit. Even if she has the numbers of men, has she still enough of the *kind* of men she wants? Her stalwarts of the first line have now for the most part found graves in Flanders and Champagne and the far-away Polish levels.

THE FIGHTING IN ARTOIS.

BRITISH "PUSH" AND FRENCH VALOUR.

SEPTEMBER 27.

A synoptic view of the great battle is possible only for the High Command. No viewpoint will show more than a little segment of the front, and the movements are so many and the theatres so widely separated that even here one cannot realize the situation of the day—only of yesterday or the day before yesterday.

To-day from a billock well to the rear of the line I watched the gun-flashes from La Bassée to south of Souchez. Sharp hailstorms drifted across the sky, and a wet mist cloaked the horizon. Saturday saw a British attack; Sunday saw the German counter-offensive, which was repelled. To-day both French and British were closely engaged, the former against the high ground east of Givenchy which is called

... of Haines to Hill 70, east of Loos, where the fighting is still proceeding.

As I write there is as yet no news of the result. But one deduction may be drawn from the last two days which is of good omen for the future. We have often been told that the German lines in the West were wearing thin. We know within narrow limits their numbers, and these numbers are less than ours. But Germany believed that by the help of her great machine she could hold her front and even take the offensive with fewer troops than her opponents. The calculation for a long time seemed to be justified, but it looks as if that day might be past. Either the Allies have got an equally strong machine or they have found a way of giving their manpower its chance. We are attacking all along the front to prevent a thin part of the German front being strengthened from elsewhere, and the plan so far looks like succeeding.

HOLDING GERMAN RESERVES.

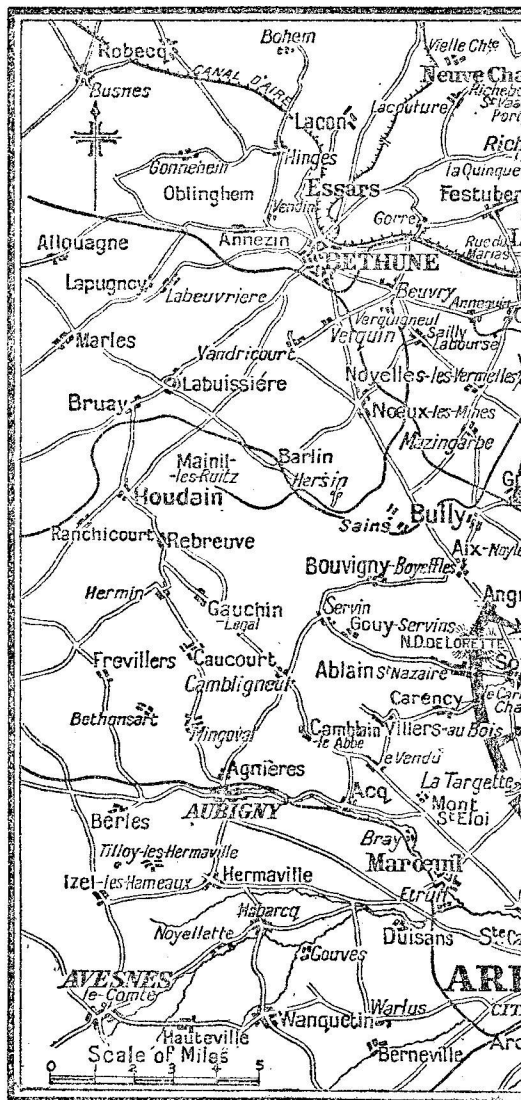
Take what happened in Artois. On Saturday, the day of a British "push," the French had on our right desperate fighting. They took the last trench of the Labyrinth. (It should be noted that the Labyrinth has extended since May. The old Labyrinth was long ago in French hands.) They took the cemetery of Souchez, which they had held before and lost, but they could make no impression on Souchez village. On Sunday the German reserves were engaged in a counter-attack on the British position. The result was that the French took Souchez village with little loss, they advanced through the wood to a point close to Givenchy-en-Gohelle, and their right wing won a position north of Thélus.

Sir John French in his dispatch has drawn the deduction, "we have in this fighting [that is, on Sunday] drawn in the enemy's reserves, thus, enabling the French on our right to make further progress." The enemy would appear to have insufficient reserves to meet attacks on two adjoining sections at the same time. If the conclusion is correct, it encourages us to hope for the best.

The great movement in Champagne has immense strategic significance, which will be obvious to anyone who looks carefully at a map of the Western front. For full details of this and the other actions we must wait. I believe that the full story of the British fighting when it is told will be one of the great pages in our military annals. Especially it will give the New Division a record of which the most veteran regiment may be proud.

TIME REQUIRED.

A word of caution may be spoken to those who look for too speedy results. A great strategic plan takes time for its working out. It was three months from von Mackensen's first assault on the Dunajec till Warsaw fell; and these three months included temporary reverses such as those on the Dniester, the Wieprz, and at Lublin. A great movement has begun, but at the best it must have its slow hours, and it is very necessary to view it in a sane perspective. Again, we have not only to win



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ANOTHER REPORT.

TERRIFIC ARTILLERY PRELUDE.

GERMANS CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

BRITISH HEADQUARTERS, SEPT. 26.

The artillery preparation which preceded the attack in the West was terrific. Great concentrations of guns had been made at various points, while enormous quantities of shells had been collected in readiness for the attack. Shortly after midnight and in the early hours of Saturday morning the German positions were subjected to a bombardment, the like of which has never been approached in this war. From the Yser Canal down to the end of the French line the Allies' guns took up the note, and soon the whole of the Allied line was thundering and re-echoing with the infernal racket.

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One of the most significant features about the Allied effort is the complete co-ordination of the different services. The great artillery bombardment was a performance which no man here will ever forget. The Germans boast of their motor transport, but ours is better, and the whole business of moving up troops and supplies and bringing back the wounded was admirably managed. There was never a moment of congestion, though it is by far the biggest movement we have ever undertaken.

As usual, the work of our airmen was brilliant in its courage and efficiency. It was their duty to keep enemy aircraft inside their own line, so as to prevent them detecting our operations. Last week there were 27 fights in the air; at least one German aeroplane was completely wrecked, and only one British machine suffered any damage. Our airmen, too, did wonderful reconnoitring work, remaining in some cases for over two hours at an altitude of 7,000ft. above the German lines. It was their business, too, to hamper the enemy's communications, to prevent him getting reserves; and in this sphere they performed the work of long-range artillery. Every day lately they have destroyed parts of the enemy's vital railways. They burnt part of Valenciennes Station, they derailed trains, and in some cases blew up parts of them. One

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At General Headquarters that continual pounding made one strangely nervous and restless, and it was impossible to settle down to anything.

REPORTS OF SURRENDERS.

Many rumours were afloat. By noon it was stated that a real advance had been made from Vermelles, Loos had fallen, Hulluch, it was at first reported, had been captured. This later proved to be incorrect. Prisoners, it was stated, were surrendering in parties—an index of demoralization among the enemy—and the French, down in the Argonne, had broken through on a front of many miles. It can easily be understood how such tidings were received after so many months of enforced stalemate.

All through the previous day the roads had been blocked by great pressure of traffic. Men, guns, stores, ammunition, everything required for fighting, choked the main arteries leading up to the points of attack. Forcing their way through the press came the dispatch riders, racing along on their motor-cycles, picking a way through that great throng with the ease and skill that comes of long practice.

As the day wore on more reliable reports of what had been happening came in. Our line had been pushed up from Vermelles-Grenay to a line running slightly to the west of Hulluch and thence down to the east of Loos, which was in our hands.

ARRIVAL OF PRISONERS.

The large numbers of prisoners taken would point to heavy losses in killed and wounded among the enemy. Nearly all of them were taken at Loos. The town was surrounded on three sides and the Germans, caught in a trap, had perforce to surrender, having, so the men said, fired their last cartridges.

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NORWICH V.C. KILLED IN ACTION.

The Lord Mayor of Norwich yesterday received the news that Lieutenant Harry Daniels, V.C., has been killed in action. Lieutenant Daniels, who was familiarly known as "Dan V.C.," won the distinction for bravery at Neuve Chapelle on March 12. He was at that time a sergeant-major in the 2nd Rifle Brigade. He was granted a commission in June.

Daniels's parents died when he was four years of age, and he spent the greater part of his boyhood in the juvenile home under the Norwich Board of Guardians.

Daniels won the V.C. at the same time as Acting-Corporal Cecil Reginald Noble. When their battalion was impeded in the advance to the attack by wire entanglements, and subjected to a very heavy machine-gun fire, the two men voluntarily rushed in front and succeeded in cutting the wires. They were both wounded, Corporal Noble afterwards dying of his wounds.

THREE CANDIDATES FOR DUBLIN ELECTION.

Three candidates were nominated yesterday for the Parliamentary vacancy in the Harbour Division of Dublin—Alderman A. Byrne and Alderman J. J. Farrell, Nationalist members of the Dublin Corporation, and The O'Mahony, a member of the old Parnellite Party.

The nomination of The O'Mahony came as a surprise, his papers being handed in 10 minutes before the close of the period in which nominations can be made.

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As soon as the long column, escorted by mounted troopers with drawn swords, had arrived at the station there was a general clamour for water and food. A big tank was filled, and up to it the prisoners marched, each carrying a pannikin or a vessel improvised out of an empty ration tin. Under the supervision of a brawny English sergeant, stripped to his shirt, each prisoner drank his fill and then gave place to the next. Those who were badly wounded were supplied by their comrades or some of the officers present.

Their thirst having been quenched, the men were next fed. They were formed into sections of 50, and from each section two men were taken to fetch the rations for their comrades. The little party marched off and soon returned, pulling a cart laden with bully beef tins and cases of biscuits. Each of the prisoners duly received his share, and soon the whole crowd was busy enjoying a hearty meal. Behind the sentries a small crowd of French people had collected and gazed with eager curiosity at the German soldiers. There were, however, no demonstrations of any kind.

Meanwhile, a German Red Cross orderly, apparently the only one among the 700, was engaged in rendering first aid to the wounded. Most of the dressings, which had evidently been roughly adjusted in the trenches, were either soiled or had slipped off altogether, and the wounded men were appealing to him for assistance.

GERMAN OFFICERS' STORIES.

The prisoners—both those I saw here and elsewhere—were quite willing to talk, and some had interesting stories to tell. Two officers who had been captured in the attack at Hooge admitted that, though the big attack had long been expected, it was a surprise when