

# BAD WEATHER IN ARTOIS.

## TASK OF THE ALLIES.

### ONLY A BEGINNING.

From JOHN BUCHAN.

BRITISH HEADQUARTERS, SEPT. 29.

The Allies are not fortunate in the weather. Both Monday and Tuesday had drenching afternoons, and to-day we have had torrential showers, with ordinary rain between, and a biting wind, which belongs to March rather than September.

This is bad for both sides, but worse for the attacking. It prevents air reconnaissance and makes all aircraft work difficult. It interferes with artillery observation work, and the spongy earth lessens the effect of shell-fire. Also, cold and wet are bound to have some influence on the spirits of even the most hardened troops. In a movement such as this the defence is in positions long prepared and presumably more or less comfortable. The attack, on the other hand, is either in improvised shelter trenches or in former German trenches, which need a good deal of work to adapt them to a line facing the other way. Happily our men seem to be better able than other races to keep cheerful in vile weather.

### SURPRISE OUT OF THE QUESTION.

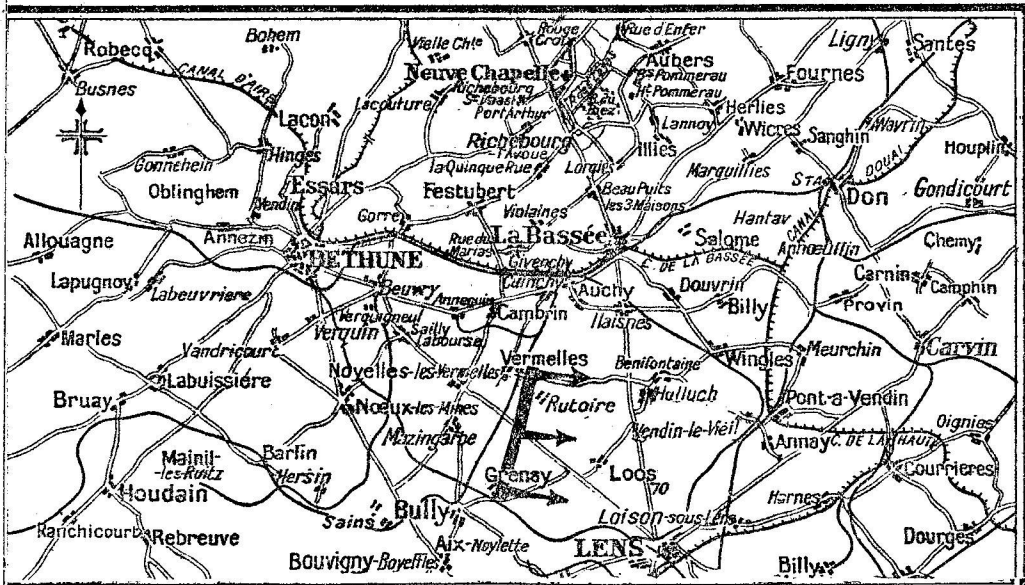
In the older wars, when the essence of an attack was speed and continuity, hostile weather conditions would have been nearly fatal to success. But this war is different. Surprise is practically out of the question. It is a straightforward trial of strength and endurance. The Germans have spent 10 months in fortifying a series of positions. Each position is a network of trench lines, three or more deep, with every kind of wire entanglement, and a number of redoubts manned by machine-guns. Such a position is impregnable to the ordinary infantry attack. It can only be carried when the defence has been more or less completely destroyed by an artillery bombardment. Even after the most successful "preparation" some parts will be left intact, and there the advance suffers losses.

There may have been a general falling back of the front, but one or two *fortins* will remain to enfilade the advance, and these have to be dealt with one by one. If many *fortins* are left, the advance sticks, and time is given to solidify the line, as happened in May in Artois. In the present movement the great French sweep northward in Champagne left certain details behind it, which were being gathered in on Monday and Tuesday.

### STAGES OF THE ADVANCE.

When the first position is cleared, the attack advances on the second. Here the same methods must be used as against the first—bombardment, and then an infantry rush. In some parts of the front we are against the second position; in others it has been carried, and we are facing the third. Some people talk as if there were an endless series of these German positions, stretching right away to the Rhine. That, of course, is un-

## THE BRITISH ATTACK IN ARTOIS.



The direction of the British attack is indicated by arrows. Hulluch, where Sir John French reports severe fighting, is a mining village to the north of the line of advance, to the east of the road between La Bassée and Lens. The scale of the map is  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles to the inch.

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When the first position is cleared, the attack advances on the second. Here the same methods must be used as against the first—bombardment, and then an infantry rush. In some parts of the front we are against the second position; in others it has been carried, and we are facing the third. Some people talk as if there were an endless series of these German positions, stretching right away to the Rhine. That, of course, is unbelievable. We do not know their number. But we may be sure that it is strictly limited. Human endurance is limited, and fortified positions on the German scale are not the work of a magician's wand, but of long and arduous labour. Again, after each position the resisting power of the enemy is weaker. He is losing heavily in guns and men, and even though he gets all the reinforcements he asks for, he is suffering from the strain of the most harassing kind of war. Besides, a time will come when the successive attacks will lead to some sector being assaulted on both sides at once, and a withdrawal on a large scale may be compulsory under the mere threat. This is specially true of a front which has the configuration of the German front in the West.

#### THE CAVALRY AT WORK.

By and by a position is forced in some sector and a retreat compelled to a line considerably in the rear. The attacking force now flings its cavalry in to harass the enemy's retirement, or cut the communication of the unbroken parts of his front. Then begins a withdrawal on a great scale, and, under certain conditions, a rout.

It is a great thing to have carried the German first position on so wide a front. But it is only a beginning. The Italians did the same thing on the Isonzo, and have been struggling for three months against the second line. The success of the Allied offensive depends on repeated efforts of equal strength with the first. There is no need for feverish hurry. Victory is not a question of hours or days, but of weeks. Human effort could make the German positions no stronger than they are; but if we are able to bring the right weapon against them, they will go. What we have done with the first and second lines we can do with the third and the fourth, and the *n*th. It means men and munitions, especially munitions. If these are forthcoming, this autumn may yet see that manœuvre battle on the grand scale for which the world has been waiting.

#### CONTAINING ACTIONS.

In a great concerted movement like the present one many parts of a line have to fight a containing battle. They have the most difficult task of all. They have none of the exhilaration of an advance; they have very little artillery support; their line may be none too strong. Their business is to hold the greatest number possible of the enemy, and it is generally a costly business. They are fighting for somebody else to win. The battalions in the main movement have earned great honour, and soon we shall all be praising them by name. But let us not forget those others whose service consisted in standing and waiting. They have captured no position, but without their quiet aid no position would have been captured.



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