

CHAPTER XIII

AMIENS, 8-11 AUGUST 1918

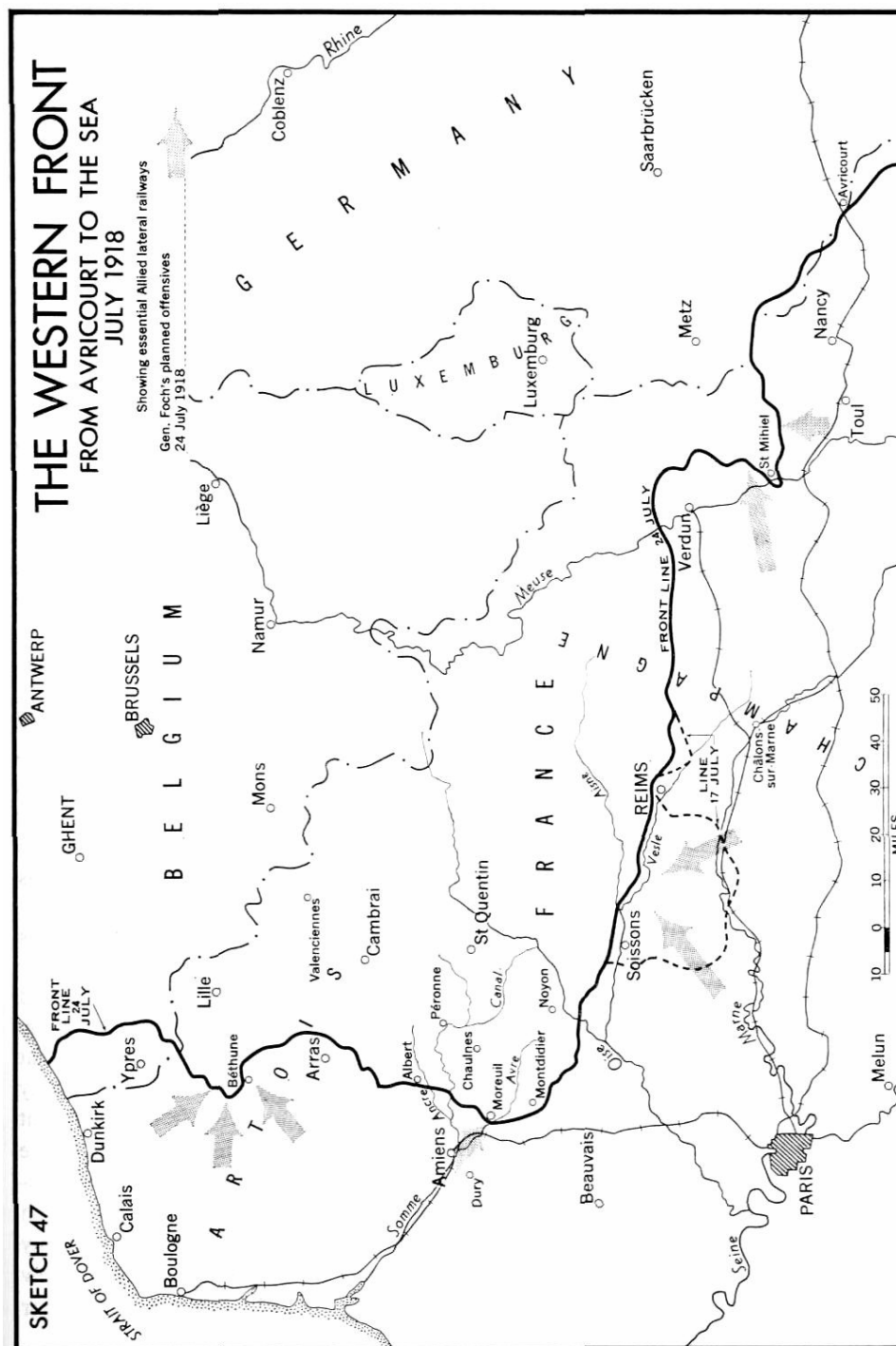
(See Map 11 and Sketches 47-49)

Prelude to the Offensive

ON 24 JULY the seventh day of the French counter-attacks on the Marne, General Foch conferred with the Allied Commanders-in-Chief near Melun, twenty five miles south-east of Paris. The situation on the Western Front gave cause for satisfaction. The German offensive east and west of Reims had been not only checked but turned from mere failure into costly defeat. For the first time since March 1918 the Allies enjoyed an overall superiority in the West-and each month a quarter of a million more American troops were arriving.

The moment had come for the Allies to assume and retain the initiative by turning from the defensive to the offensive. With a view to developing later operations as well as improving France's economic position, Foch proposed to Haig three limited offensives to free essential communications, to be followed by two more to liberate the northern coal-mining area and clear the Germans from the vicinity of Calais and Dunkirk. The Generalissimo was cautious in his optimism as to what these might accomplish. "How long these different operations will take and how far they will carry us", he set down in the memorandum which he presented to the conference, "cannot be determined now. Nevertheless, if the results at which they aim are attained before too late in the year, we can from now onwards look forward to an offensive to be launched at the end of the summer or during the autumn of such importance as will increase our advantages and leave no respite to the enemy."¹

The first of these planned operations would continue the attacks then in progress, and was aimed at pushing the enemy farther back from the Paris-Chalons-Toul-Avrincourt railway, an important lateral line running towards Strasburg. The second (scheduled for 10 August but shortly advanced to the 8th) was to be launched from the Amiens region to remove the threat posed by the Montdidier-Moreuil salient to the Paris-Amiens railway, another vital lateral. The third offensive, an attack on the St. Mihiel salient, was intended to free the eastern portion of the Paris-Avrincourt line. Foch was emphatic that these operations and the two in the north should follow each other closely so as to disorganize the enemy's use of reserves and allow him no time to reorganize his forces.²



The Marne counter-attack became a mere follow-up of a voluntary German retirement. It met no strong resistance, for the enemy abandoned Soissons and took up a new position on the north bank of the Vesle, content to hold his fire in the hope of being able soon to launch campaigns elsewhere, particularly against the British in Flanders and the French east and south-east of Reims. The German High Command expected an early revival of the French offensive now all but ended, to be followed by a series of thrusts in Flanders, between the Somme and the Oise, east of Reims, against the St. Mihiel salient, and farther south on the Lorraine front. These Allied efforts, in General Ludendorff's view, would take the form of isolated local attacks by troops who were "also tired, yet on the whole not less so than ourselves".³ He did not foresee that the attacks which took place would develop into a mighty battle across the whole front.

General Foch issued his formal order for the Amiens operation on 28 July. The offensive, which was to be "pushed as far as possible in the direction of Roye", was to be carried out by the British Fourth Army and the French First Army, placed under Haig's command.⁴ The Fourth Army (General Rawlinson), which had been reconstituted towards the end of the first German offensive, was in effect the old Fifth Army; a new Fifth Army (General Sir William Birdwood) had been formed on 23 May.⁵ Besides his present forces—the Australian Corps and the 3rd Corps—Rawlinson would receive as reinforcement the Canadian Corps, then in reserve to the First Army.

To clear the way for the attack and at the same time give the impression of freeing French forces for operations elsewhere, at the beginning of August the Fourth Army's boundary with the French First Army was moved from the Amiens-Villers-Bretonneux-Chaulnes railway 7000 yards south to the Amiens-Roye-Noyon road. The change was effected without introducing any new formations into the front line, the British 3rd Corps, commanded by Lieut.-General Sir R.H.K. Butler, taking over all Australian positions north of the Somme and the Australian Corps (Lieut.-General Sir John Monash) extending itself as far as the new inter-army boundary. To the enemy this apparent weakening of the front gave no indication of an impending attack. He did not know that the Australians were acting as a screen behind which the Canadian Corps was to concentrate for a major role in the forthcoming offensive. As early as 20 July General Currie had been told of the C.-in-C.'s proposal to use the Canadian Corps in an attack by the French Army to free the Paris-Amiens railway; and on the 26th he learned that General Foch had modified these plans so as to include the French First Army on the right flank.⁶ The order of battle for the attack would thus have from right to left two French corps between the Avre River and the Amiens-Roye road, the Canadian Corps between that road and the Amiens-Chaulnes railway, the Australian Corps between the railway and the Somme, and the 3rd Corps between the Somme and the Ancre. Getting the Canadians from the area of the First Army to the Fourth, and thence into their battle positions in the right half of the new Australian sector without disclosing their presence to the enemy posed major problems of security and administration.

"It is of the first importance", G.H.Q. emphasized in elaborating the Generalissimo's orders for the Amiens offensive, "that secrecy should be observed and the operation carried out as a surprise."⁷ Instructions on "Secrecy" issued by the Fourth Army directed that on and after 1 August all movement of troops and transport in an easterly direction should take place by night, whether in the forward or back areas, except where daylight moves were absolutely necessary - the R.A.F. was to fly over the Army area and report any signs of abnormal military activity. In order to deceive the enemy as to Allied intentions work would continue on the construction and maintenance of rear lines of defence. Neither the Canadian Corps in its move southward nor divisions in reserve to the 3rd Corps would be permitted to open any wireless stations until after zero hour.⁸ Reconnaissance of the German positions was rigidly restricted - "Nothing attracts attention to an offensive more than a large number of officers with maps looking over the parapet and visiting O.P.s."⁹ (A party of staff officers from the Canadian Corps were attached to the Australian Corps to allow personal examination of the new area.) Since it was impossible to conceal the preparations for the attack from the troops who were to take part, further security instructions were ordered pasted in every individual's service and pay book. Under the emphatic heading, "KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT", these cautioned against loose talk before the offensive and directed that anyone having the ill fortune to be taken prisoner should supply no information beyond rank and name. Though the enemy might use threats, "he will respect you" if your courage, patriotism, and self-control do not fail."¹¹

The projected local attack on Orange Hill, east of Arras, opposite the old Canadian sector, was cancelled; but at General Currie's suggestion the preparations for it were continued in the hope of deceiving the enemy.¹² On 27 July, to attract German attention to Flanders, the Royal Air Force was ordered to occupy additional aerodromes in the Second Army's area and to increase activity on that front until 6 August.¹³ To the same end the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles and the 27th Battalion, with certain signal and medical units, were ordered to Flanders on the 29th-ostensibly as an advanced party of the Canadian Corps. The signallers erected their sets and began a flow of dummy wireless traffic to aid in deceiving the enemy.¹⁴ (These units rejoined the main body in its new location two days before the attack.)¹⁵

These measures were not completely effective. German Intelligence noted the presence of Canadian units with the Second Army, but evidently did not draw the desired conclusion. Prisoners taken in this period stated that the enemy expected an attack astride the Scarpe rather than in Flanders.¹⁶ On 4 August, the German High Command, in notifying General von der Marwitz's Second Army of the disappearance of two Canadian divisions from the front line, pointed to the British Third or Fourth Army as a likely new location.¹⁷ Yet if the enemy was not fully deceived, at least he was confused. A German divisional

* Such an instance had been recorded some weeks earlier by the Royal Air Force. A German battalion commander had told his men to imitate the example of the pilot of a British single-seater forced down behind the enemy lines. He had refused to answer to questioning, even when threatened with shooting. The source of this report?—a German prisoner.¹⁰

staff officer captured by the 2nd Canadian Division on the first day of battle stated that while an attack had been expected, because of British air activity, it was not considered imminent.¹⁸

On 30 July the main body of the Canadian Corps began to move by train and bus from the Arras area to the concentration area south-west of Amiens. Rigid security restrictions continued. Even the senior A. & Q. staff officer was not notified of the destination until the 29th. As already noted, divisional commanders were informed on the same date, but they were warned not to discuss the matter with subordinates. The troops at first understood that they were going to the Ypres front, "where the Second Army expected a German attack"- a rumor reinforced by fictitious orders.¹⁹ While the transfer of the Canadian Corps and other reinforcements for the Fourth Army was carried out with great secrecy-all trains were loaded and unloaded in darkness-false moves were staged by day, accompanied by much noise, dust and dummy wireless traffic, to a feigned concentration area some twenty miles north-west of Arras.²⁰ When it was no longer possible to conceal from the troops themselves the general direction in which they were going, they were "officially" informed that the Canadian Corps was in G.H.Q. reserve and might be called on to assist French forces on the Reims-Soissons front, or support either the French First Army or the British Fourth Army.*

During the first week of August nightly marches took the Canadian units from their billets in the concentration area towards their battle assembly positions. The nights were very dark, and to add to the difficulties the approach to the front was made through unfamiliar country and along very narrow roads. There was much congestion of wheeled traffic, which was restricted mainly to the Amiens-Roye and the Amiens-St. Quentin roads, the latter being shared with the Australian Corps. Problems of supply added to the administrative headaches.

The area which the Australians had taken over - soon to be the Canadian sector -was still organized as for French troops, for orders were that "nothing should be done in the area which might arouse the suspicion of the enemy".²² (This emphasis on secrecy seems to have been misdirected, for, as already noted, the replacement of French by Australian troops was not intended to be a secret.) Storing ammunition at advanced refilling points could not begin in earnest until 3 August, and the nearest Fourth Army ammunition dump was so far away that lorries were unable to make more than one trip daily. Until the 5th or 6th, when the bulk of the heavy artillery transport arrived, there was a shortage of lorries; thereafter the problem was a scarcity of petrol. Fortunately, the weather prevented the enemy's air observers from detecting the abnormal traffic on the forward roads, yet permitted our bombers to fly over the area and cover the noise

* As not infrequently happens, the emphasis on secrecy was open to question. A Canadian brigade commander, protesting afterwards against the withholding of information from those responsible for planning, urged that in similar situations in the future battalion and company commanders be given a longer period in which to develop their plans and study their maps. He suggested that officers who could not be trusted to maintain secrecy were not fit to command battalions and companies.²¹

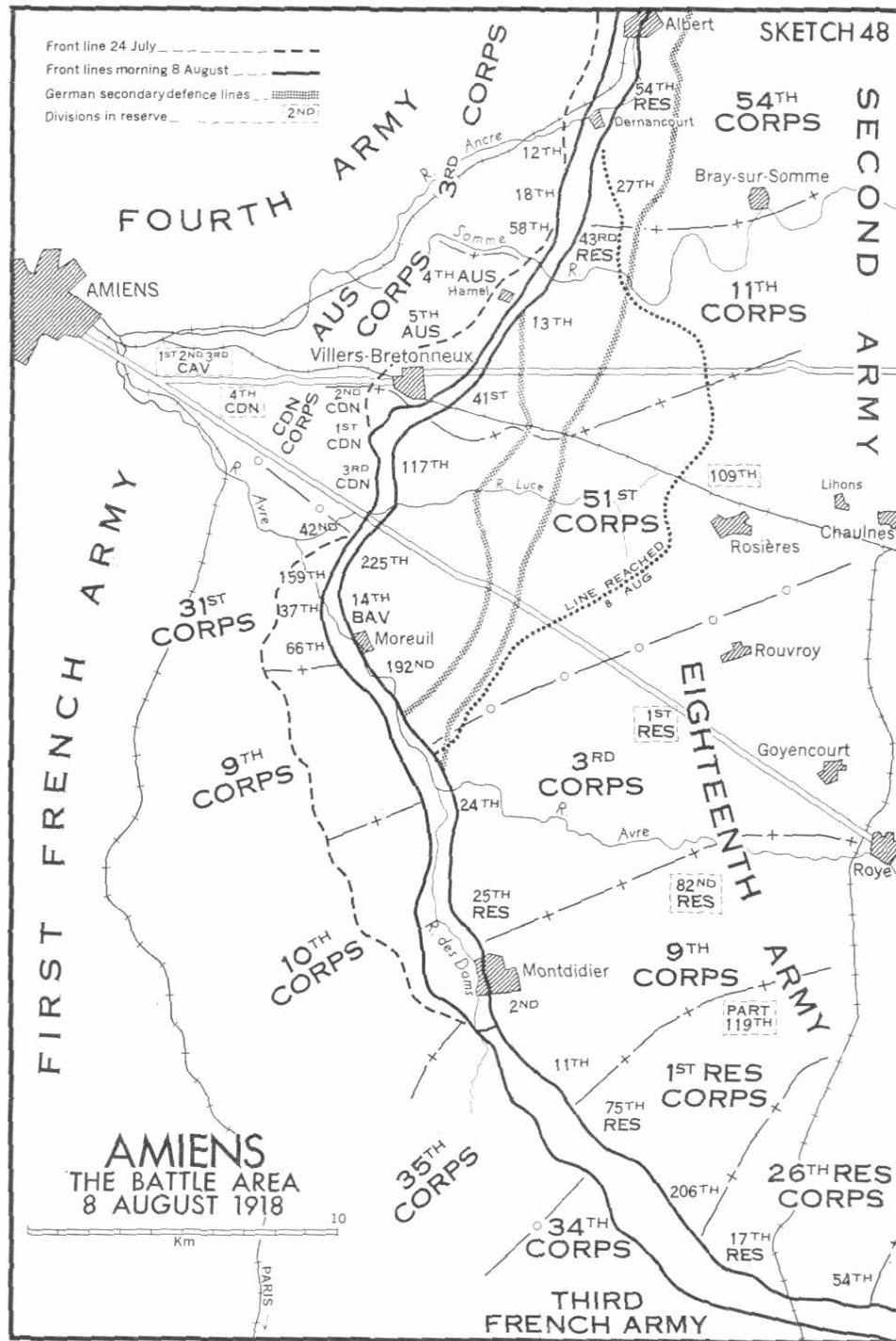
of tanks moving into position. Considering the tremendous amount of work to be done in such a brief time and under the limitations imposed by security, the administrative preparations went remarkably well. A slight shortage of small-arms ammunition and grenades had to be accepted. Some units, unable to get British grenades in time for the attack, drew from French sources.²³

In the early hours of 4 August, the enemy raided posts held by the 4th Australian Division astride the Amiens-Roye road and made off with five prisoners. To the credit of the security measures taken by the Australian Corps and divisional staffs these captives gave no information. Even a hint dropped at this time could have turned the Amiens operation into a disaster. This was the future Canadian sector, in which the hand-over was scheduled to begin that evening and end on the night of the 6th-7th. The incident brought a postponement, lest a further raid should disclose the presence of Canadians in the line. Ultimately the relief of the forward troops did not take place until the 8th, within a few hours of zero.²⁴

The Opposing Forces

Besides the raid on the 4th, other incidents in the four days preceding the offensive caused concern as to how much the enemy knew of Allied plans. On the afternoon of the 4th the German troops opposite the left of the British 3rd Corps abandoned their bridgehead west of the Ancre, and on the French First Army's front between Montdidier and Moreuil there were similar withdrawals across the Avre and the Rivière des Doms. In Flanders during the next three days the enemy retired 1500 yards on a ten-mile front. Meanwhile, on the morning of the 6th, in a local attack on a two-and-a-half-mile front between the Somme and the lower Ancre, the Germans made advances of up to 800 yards and took some 235 British prisoners. As it happened, the purpose of these moves was to eliminate salients or otherwise shorten the line. None was related to the forthcoming Franco-British operation; and according to the Germans themselves the prisoners taken on the 6th gave no hint of an impending offensive. The German attack on the Fourth Army's left, however, necessitated a change in the British start line and the fire plan. A counter-attack next day tired out troops who were to fight again on the 8th, and though it recovered part of the lost ground, the enemy was now very much more on his guard here.²⁵ Yet he could learn nothing on the Amiens front from aerial observation. When the weather was not adverse, the German flyers were driven back by superior Allied air strength.²⁶

On the Fourth Army's right the French First Army, commanded by General Debeney, had in the line seven divisions which would be engaged on the opening day along an eight-mile front centred about Moreuil. As the battle developed additional formations would be brought in on the right flank; and it was Foch's intention that ultimately the French Third Army (General Humbert), on the south side of the German salient, would join in the attack. On General Rawlinson's own front there would be three Canadian divisions from just south



of the Roye road to just north of the railway to Chaulnes; and between the railway and the Ancre River two divisions of the Australian Corps and three of the British 3rd Corps. In immediate reserve were three French, one Canadian and two Australian divisions - making a total of twenty-one Allied divisions opposing von der Marwitz's fourteen.

The Allied attack would have massive artillery support. The French had 780 field and 826 heavy or super-heavy guns, which gave them a field piece to every forty-five yards of front and a heavy to each forty-two yards. The Fourth Army had 1386 field guns and howitzers - twenty-nine yards' frontage per piece - and 684 heavies, one to each fifty-nine yards.²⁷ Whereas the Germans had few if any tanks opposite Amiens,* their opponents possessed 604 tanks of all types. The Fourth Army would employ 324 heavy fighting tanks and exploit with 96 "Whippet" medium tanks. (The standard fighting tank was now the Mark V, which, despite thicker armour than previous models, was somewhat faster -4.6 miles per hour as compared with 3.7 - and more manoeuvrable. The Whippet, which weighed fourteen tons, was armed only with light machine-guns, and had an average speed of five miles per hour.) Seventy-two Whippets were allotted to French follow-up forces.²⁹

In the air the Germans were considerably outnumbered. The British Fourth Army had available 800 machines-239 heavy bombers (day and night), 376 fighters, and 185 reconnaissance or fighter-reconnaissance planes - and the French First Army had a total of 1349 aircraft. His main air strength being in Champagne, the enemy had only 365 machines of all types opposite the British Fourth and French First Armies. This disparity was somewhat reduced, however, by the arrival of German air reinforcements on the first day of the operation.³⁰

The front on which the British Fourth Army was to attack coincided exactly with that held by the German Second Army (General von der Marwitz). This army was the extreme left wing of Crown Prince Rupprecht's Group of Armies. On its left was the Eighteenth Army, forming with the Ninth Army the right wing of Crown Prince Wilhelm's Group of Armies. In anticipation of a renewed Allied effort in the sector held by these three armies a decision had been reached to combine them under a new Army Group Headquarters, to be commanded by General von Boehn (previously commanding the Seventh Army), with General von Lossberg as his Chief of Staff. The new arrangement became effective on 12 August. It had been Ludendorff's hope to hand von Boehn a well consolidated line. "Unfortunately", he wrote, "events were to prove me wrong."³¹ The Second Army had ten divisions in the front line and four in reserve. In addition, the boundary with the Eighteenth Army (General von Hutier) ran north-eastward across the Amiens-Roye road, putting two of that army's reserve divisions (the 1st Reserve and the 119th) in the rear area of the Allied objective.³²

General von der Marwitz judged only two of his divisions to be "fully battle fit", but a staff officer sent by Ludendorff to discuss with the Second

* They had a total of 40 tanks in the field-fifteen of German make and twenty-five captured from the allies.²⁸

Army defensive measures on the front Albert-Moreuil (the actual area attacked on 8 August) reported that it was necessary to relieve only two divisions that were very tired after a long period of service in the line.³³ The sector where the Canadians were to strike was manned by three divisions rated by their commander as “average” - from south to north the 225th and 117th Divisions, and part of the 41st Division. At the time of the attack the 117th had barely completed its relief of the 109th Division, a battle-worn formation of like calibre.³⁴

Ludendorff seems to have been satisfied that the Second Army's defences were in reasonably good order, though he noted that von der Marwitz had fallen behind the Eighteenth Army in the construction of field works. Otherwise the lessons learned in the setback on 18 July had been put to good use - “the divisional fronts were narrow, artillery was plentiful and the trench system was organized depth”.³⁵ Marwitz's own headquarters expected only strong local attacks. Reports of the assembly of British tanks (which not even the most thorough deception programme could fully conceal) were attributed to “phantoms of the imagination or nervousness”.³⁶ On 4 August, Ludendorff, more concerned about the morale of his own troops - many of whom were “depressed down to Hell” - than the possibility of a surprise attack, issued an order of the day in which he sought to dispel the feeling of apprehension with which many were reported to be viewing the possibility of an Allied offensive. He declared that the French owed their successes in the counter - offensive of 18 July to their tanks, and that these would not have been formidable if the German infantry had not allowed itself to be surprised, and had the artillery been sufficiently distributed in depth. This situation had been rectified on the Second Army's front by effecting a judicious organization in depth of infantry and guns. “Henceforward”, he went on with grand assurance,

... we can await every hostile attack with the greatest confidence. As I have already explained, we should wish for nothing better than to see the enemy launch an offensive, which can but hasten the disintegration of his forces.³⁷

The Plan of Battle

The pattern for the Amiens offensive had been set at Cambrai in the previous November. Since then the proper use of tanks in the attack had been strikingly demonstrated in a more recent and completely successful tank - infantry operation on a smaller scale on 4 July, when ten battalions of the 4th Australian Division had teamed up with sixty British tanks to capture the town of Hamel, between Villers-Bretonneux and the Somme.³⁸ In general the area of the forthcoming battle was well suited to the employment of armour. The country was a rolling plateau, with little relief in the French sector, but broken in the north by the valleys of tributaries of the Somme and the Avre. One of these, the Luce, had cut a wide trench nearly 200 feet deep that ran through the Canadian sector of attack. The Luce flowed generally down the line of the 1st Canadian Division's axis, its side branches cutting across the division's routes forward, and

the river had to be crossed by the right wing of the 3rd Canadian Division before the battle opened. Only two crossings were available behind the start line: to construct other bridges or causeways would have risked betraying the Allied intentions.

Apart from a few woods and orchard-encircled villages that offered obvious defensive possibilities, the German positions south of the Somme consisted of little more than three lines of trench, poorly wired and without good shelters. Behind the front system adjoining no man's land, instead of the usual battle zone and rear zone, the enemy relied on the former French Amiens' defences (above, p. 371,*n*). The inner, or more westerly of these, crossing the front through Marcelcave, Demuin and Mézières, consisted of a series of disconnected posts dating from 1915; the outer line, which passed east of Harbonnières, Caix and Hangest, was well wired, but most of the wire was on the east side. Between these the enemy had constructed a length of trench in March 1918. The main strength of the defence proved to lie in a vast number of hidden machine-guns scattered in great depth across the front.³⁹

The orders issued the Fourth Army by General Rawlinson on 6 August contemplated much more than the original intention of freeing the Paris-Amiens railway. At a conference on 5 August Sir Douglas Haig had impressed on his army and corps commanders that with General Foch's proposal to bring the French Third Army into the operation the battle would develop into one of considerable magnitude. There was to be less emphasis on consolidation and more on exploitation. Cambrai had taught the need for strong infantry reserves to follow up tank successes. To this end three British divisions were assembled in G.H.Q. reserve and held close behind the battle front in readiness to "maintain the fight and to take full advantage of any success gained".⁴⁰ The Outer Amiens Defence Line, seven miles distant, was now only an initial objective. It would be the Fourth Army's role to push forward as rapidly as possible a further eight miles to the line Roye-Chaulnes—roughly the old front line held by the British in the spring of 1917 before the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line. If the enemy could be thrust back towards Ham (thirteen miles beyond Chaulnes), the operations of the French driving north-eastwards from the Noyon-Montdidier front would be greatly facilitated.⁴¹

To the Canadian Corps fell the responsibility of striking the main blow on the Fourth Army's right. From its boundary with the French First Army the Corps start line crossed the Amiens-Roye road at Hourges, a village about nine miles from Amiens, and continued in a north-easterly direction for half a mile to the River Luce. It then turned north for 4500 yards before bending towards the east again to cut the Amiens-Chaulnes railway a mile beyond Villers-Bretonneux. The Corps task on the first day was to capture an intermediate objective (the Green Line) and to seize and hold the Red Line, which ran in a north-easterly direction from Mézières, south of the Roye road, to just west of Harbonnières (north of the railway). The Australian Corps would attack on the left of the Canadians, while north of the Somme the 3rd Corps, keeping its left on

the Ancre, would occupy the north end of the old Amiens line and consolidate it as a defensive flank to the advance of the main forces farther south. The 2nd Canadian Division, on General Currie's left flank, had as an additional objective the Blue Line, which angled forward from the Red towards the village of Harbonnières (in the Australian sector).⁴²

The infantry having done their job, it was planned that the Cavalry Corps would pass through at the Red Line to capture the Outer Amiens Defence Line, represented on the operations map by the Blue Dotted Line. For this purpose the 3rd Cavalry Division (which included the Canadian Cavalry Brigade) was placed directly under General Currie's command. There was special provision to give added strength on the Corps right, where greater resistance was expected (below, p. 405). The 4th Canadian Division, advancing from corps reserve at zero hour behind the two infantry divisions attacking on the right, was to pass through at the Red Line and either relieve the 3rd Cavalry Division in the Blue Dotted Line between the Roye road and Caix, or assist in the capture of that objective. The cavalry would then push forward to the line Roye-Chaulnes. Meanwhile, south of the Amiens-Roye road the French attack would develop from left to right as the Canadians advanced, with the 31st Corps directed on Hangest and the 9th Corps keeping contact on the right. The attack by General Debeney's might, south of Montdidier, was not due to start until 9 August.⁴³

The time set for the assault by the Canadian and Australian Corps was 4:20 am. To aid surprise there would be no preliminary bombardment, the infantry counting on the barrage and the tanks to deal with the enemy wire and machine guns. The French, however, having lost most of their heavy tanks on the Marne front in July had only a limited number of light tanks available for the forthcoming operation. Consequently surprise on their front would be sacrificed for an artillery bombardment of forty-five minutes, synchronized to begin with the opening of the Fourth Army's barrage at zero. Their assault would go in at 5:05.⁴⁴

With so deep a penetration planned for the Canadians, the provision of adequate artillery support necessitated special arrangements. For the first two miles or more the assaulting battalions would have the benefit of the full weight of the barrage; thenceforth they would be assisted as far forward as possible by the heavy guns, and this support would be supplemented by batteries of field artillery (a brigade to each infantry division) leapfrogging forward to new positions in captured territory to keep the enemy within range. Altogether General Currie had at his disposal seventeen brigades of field artillery, nine heavy brigades, three batteries of 6-inch guns and one 12-inch howitzer battery - a total of 646 pieces. These included all the Canadian artillery units in France except the 1st and 2nd Brigades Canadian Garrison Artillery, which had remained with the First Army. The Royal Artillery provided a divisional artillery firing in the barrage, two heavy brigades on miscellaneous bombardment tasks, six heavy brigades on counter-battery, and four heavy batteries on long-range harassing fire.⁴⁵

Each of the three assaulting Canadian divisions was allotted a battalion of 42 fighting tanks from the British 4th Tank Brigade. (The 4th Division, in

corps reserve, received a 36-tank battalion.) These were distributed among the infantry brigades, and to ensure continuous armoured support a number were held back for committal after the first two objectives had been reached. Tanks were sub-allotted to battalions in sections of three, and an infantryman was detailed to ride in each tank to maintain liaison between the tank commander and the infantry.⁴⁶ There were also attached to each infantry division an average of six Mark IV supply tanks charged with delivering to the forward units trench-mortar and small-arms ammunition, drinking water, wire, stakes and picks and shovels. Each tank battalion had six supply tanks to bring petrol forward, and the Corps Chief Engineer was allotted six to carry additional equipment and stores to the final objective. Although numerous breakdowns caused serious delays in the early stages of the operation, the supply tanks later proved of great help in maintaining the advance.⁴⁷

Air cooperation and support for the Canadians was provided by No. 5 (Corps Reconnaissance) Squadron R.A.F., which was attached to the Canadian Corps from July 1918 to the end of the war. The primary task of this and similar units on 8 August was the laying of smoke-screens at points beyond the artillery's range and supplementing the artillery smoke-screens with 40-pound phosphorus bombs. (There was a shortage of the 60-pound artillery smoke shells.) As things turned out a heavy morning mist that blanketed the whole area of attack was to reduce the need for a smoke-screen but also interfere with the provision of all forms of air support. Smoke bombs were nevertheless accurately dropped on the Canadian and Australian fronts and provided useful screening; and as the mist cleared away during the morning, patrols of the 5th Squadron flew over the battlefield trying to keep located the continually changing and always indefinite line where the foremost troops were in conflict with the enemy.⁴⁸

In assigning his three assault divisions their positions General Currie placed the 1st Canadian Division in the centre, with the 2nd Division on its left and the 3rd on its right. The role of the 3rd Division, attacking astride the Amiens-Roye road, was one of special difficulty, not only because of the handicap imposed by the valley of the River Luce, but because of General Lipsett's responsibility to protect the Canadian right flank until the French, starting their advance at 5:05, should catch up. Accordingly the 3rd Division was given a somewhat narrower frontage for its initial attack, and its barrage would be furnished by six field artillery brigades as against four for each of the other infantry divisions.⁴⁹ A special international force was organized to provide liaison with the French. It consisted of a platoon of the 43rd Battalion and a detachment of some 30 men, with a machine-gun, from the French 42nd Division.⁵⁰

Once the 3rd Division had made good its Red Line objective, the task of protecting the cavalry's right flank and providing liaison between cavalry and infantry was to be carried out by the "Canadian Independent Force", composed of the 1st and 2nd Motor Machine Gun Brigades, nine Lewis gun detachments of the Canadian Corps Cyclist Battalion and a section of two 6-inch trench mortars mounted on trucks. The Force, which was commanded by Brig.-Gen. Brutinel, was to secure the Amiens-Roye road between the second and third objectives,

and be ready to exploit further success.⁵¹

The Battle Opens, 8 August - The Assault by the 3rd Division

The night of 7-8 August was fine with no moon. There was a tense air of expectancy as the troops earmarked for the assault moved up under cover of darkness to their assembly area.* On the Canadian Corps right the 3rd Division relieved an Australian brigade at 2:00 am.; it was four o'clock, only twenty minutes from zero, before the last of General Lipsett's attacking units were in position. By that time a thick ground mist had begun to form in the valleys, blotting out visibility even after the sun had risen. The supporting tanks began to move for ward at twelve minutes before zero from positions one thousand yards behind the front. To drown the hum of their engines - running as quietly as possible in second gear - the artillery maintained a normal harassing fire, and a large bombing plane droned noisily up and down above the forward trenches. Exactly at 4:20 the barrage opened with the thunder of more than nine hundred guns and immediately the assaulting infantry pressed forward.⁵⁴ In the Luce valley, where the mist was especially heavy, the Canadians were hard put to it to keep pace and direction. The enemy's barrage came down within a few minutes of zero, but thanks to the excellent counter-battery work of the British guns the German fire was generally erratic and not particularly damaging.

The 1st and 2nd Divisions were each attacking on a single brigade frontage, using a fresh brigade at successive lines of advance, but because the River Luce split the 3rd Division's front General Lipsett employed two brigades in the initial phase. He crowded three battalions of the 9th Brigade and a company of the 5th Tank Battalion into the narrow bridgehead south of the river about Hourges, while on his left flank the 8th Brigade assaulted with a single battalion up.

The leading battalions advanced well deployed so as to reduce the number of casualties from the enemy's fire. In general each was disposed in five waves at intervals of one hundred yards. Skirmishers in the foremost wave of two lines, thirty yards apart, helped guide the tanks. The next three waves consisted of well dispersed section columns in single file; and carrying parties brought up the rear. The infantry found themselves less heavily burdened than in former operations, for to meet the requirements of a prolonged yet rapid advance General Rawlinson's staff had devised a modified "fighting order"[†] which eliminated some unnecessary weight and distributed the rest more evenly.⁵⁵

* Each division reported assembly completed by sending Corps Headquarters the code word "Llandoverly Castle". Operational instructions for the attack issued by Canadian Corps Headquarters bore the initials "L.C."⁵² The Llandoverly Castle, a British merchant vessel serving as a Canadian hospital ship, had been torpedoed on 27 June 1918, while returning to England from Halifax. Of a Canadian crew and medical staff totalling 258 all ranks, only 24 survived. Among those who perished were the fourteen Canadian Nursing Sisters aboard.⁵⁸

† This consisted of haversack, 250 rounds of ammunition (100 in bandoliers), gas mask, water bottle, "iron rations" (corned beef and biscuits), entrenching tool, two Mills bombs and two sandbags.

Brig.-Gen. D. M. Ormond's 9th Brigade achieved early and satisfying success. Taken completely by surprise the Germans allowed themselves to be overrun in their positions, many surrendering without firing a shot. In a little more than an hour the 43rd Battalion on the right had men in Rifle (or "Dodo") Wood, immediately south of the main road; but it was not until 7:30, after the 116th Battalion had overcome German resistance north of the road and tanks had worked their way southward among the shattered stumps cleaning out machine-gun posts, that the wood could be reported free of enemy. There were regimental claims of upwards of 40 machine-guns captured, and more than 250 German prisoners.⁵⁶ The tanks had found the going hard. Handicapped by lack of a detailed ground reconnaissance - which was forbidden in the interests of security - they were blinded by the dense mist and further impeded by the marshy ground. Many were late in starting and all found it virtually impossible to maintain direction and keep touch with the foot soldiers as tank-infantry co-operation largely broke down.⁵⁷

By half-past seven the 9th Brigade had reached the Green Line. The 116th Battalion, suffering fairly heavy casualties, had captured Hamon Wood, between the Luce and the Roye road; and on the divisional left the 58th Battalion, working closely with its tanks, had fought its way into the village of Demuin on the south bank of the river.* The battalion then pressed on to occupy Courcelles, just before the Green Line.⁵⁹ North of the Luce, in Brig.-Gen. D.C. Draper's narrow sector, the 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles got well ahead of its tanks in the morning mist and in forty minutes had captured its first objective, Cemetery Copse, unaided. The tanks came up in time to help clear the nearby village of Hangard, moving on to form a bridgehead over the Luce at Demuin. The 2nd C.M.R. then passed through to complete the 8th Brigade's part in the first stage.⁶⁰

These were exhilarating successes, but there was no time to lose if the momentum of the attack was to be maintained. While the 3rd Division's assaulting units had been winning their way to the Green Line, behind them the reserve infantry battalions of the 7th Brigade, moving up on a strict schedule, had filed over the Luce on duckboard bridges and marched forward in high spirits as they met an ever-increasing flow of German prisoners being shepherded to the rear. They passed through the 8th and 9th Brigades, and in jumping-off trenches at the far edge of Hamon Wood and to the north they formed up ready for the next phase of the operation.

Promptly at 8:20 the attack was resumed, Brig.-Gen. Dyer sending forward the 49th Battalion on the left, the 42nd in the centre, and The Royal Canadian Regiment on the right astride the Roye road. Progress was rapid. The 49th Battalion, meeting little opposition in its advance across the unfenced fields of standing grain, reached the Red Line at ten o'clock. In the centre the 42nd, having overrun two German batteries that were engaging it with point-blank fire,

* In this attack an N.C.O. of the 58th Battalion, Corporal H.G.B. Miner, rushed three enemy posts—two of them single-handed—and turned a captured machine-gun on the enemy with telling effect. He was awarded the Victoria Cross, posthumously, having been mortally wounded at the third position.⁵⁸

crossed over the plateau of Hill 102 and arrived on its objective with four supporting tanks at 10:20. The last part of the advance, wrote the regimental historian, “was more or less of a route march enlivened by the sight of the panic-stricken enemy running in every direction”.⁶¹

Meanwhile the R.C.R., proceeding with “something approaching the clock like precision of a well rehearsed manoeuvre”, was already on its objective, having cleared two woods with the assistance of the few surviving tanks.⁶² On the Canadian Corps’ right the Franco-Canadian liaison detachment, while maintaining contact between the 3rd Canadian and 42nd French Divisions’ flanks, had contrived to clear a small copse south of Rifle Wood, taking thirty prisoners and a dozen machine-guns. On reaching the Green Line the original Canadian component rejoined its parent unit (the 43rd Battalion) and was replaced by a platoon from the R.C.R.

The 3rd Division had completed its assignment, though of its original 42 tanks only eight remained. The final infantry advance to the Blue Dotted Line on this part of the front was to be made by the 4th Canadian Division.

In German eyes the capture of the southern part of the Red Line had settled the fate of the 225th Division, except at Mézières, outside the Canadian right boundary. The official German report spoke of the loss of the entire artillery position and the virtual destruction of all the front line and support battalions. The division’s reserve battalions, rushed in piecemeal, “had either been thrown back or had not got into action at all”.⁶³ Towards 10:00 a.m., the faltering 225th Division was told that the 376th Regiment of the 109th Division was being placed under its command and sent to Cayeux. It would also receive the Regiment Bellmann, composed of the three resting battalions of the 192nd Division, being assembled in the wooded area south-east of Beaucourt. In addition the 1st Reserve Division from the neighbouring corps of the Eighteenth Army was moving forward astride the Roye-Amiens road with orders to stop any Canadian attacks in the Beaucourt-Fresnoy area.⁶⁴

The Advance on the Corps Left

We must now go back and examine the fortunes of General Currie’s remaining assault divisions. The 1st Canadian Division, in the Corps centre, had been given the task of breaking through the wooded area north of the Luce and fighting forward from Hangard Wood on a decreasing frontage to the Outer Amiens Defence Line beyond Caix. In the later stages General Macdonell’s forces would have to negotiate the valley of the Luce, which was flanked by a number of tree-clad ravines that gave the defender every advantage.

The initial phase was carried out by the 3rd Brigade (Brig.-Gen. Tuxford) - from right to left, the 16th, 13th and 14th Battalions. While the dense mist made infantry-tank cooperation difficult, it had the advantage of hiding the attackers from the German view, thereby substantially reducing the effectiveness of the enemy’s fire. Disregarding threats from flank and rear, the Canadians

pushed quickly ahead. Small detachments which became involved in local actions left the mopping up for succeeding waves. So rapid was the advance that the 3rd and 5th Battalions, which theoretically were not involved in this stage of the attack,* found themselves committed in sharp encounters with parties of Germans that had been by-passed. Twenty-five hundred yards from the start line fighting developed all along the trenches which formed the enemy's main line of resistance in front of his artillery positions.⁶⁵ It was here that Private J.B. Croak earned the first of two Victoria Crosses won that day by members of the 13th Battalion. Having attacked and captured a machine-gun nest single-handed, Croak, though badly wounded, later charged another German strongpoint and with the aid of other members of his platoon silenced three machine-guns, bayoneting or capturing their crews. Wounded a second time, he died just after the last resistance was overcome.⁶⁶ Equally courageous was Corporal H.J. Good, of the 13th, in disposing of three machine-guns and their crews, and then with the assistance of three comrades, assaulting and capturing German battery of 5.9-inch guns and their entire crews.⁶⁷

Beyond Aubercourt, where the division entered the Luce Valley, the speed of the advance quickened, for with the lifting of the fog the 3rd Brigade was able to get forward its supporting tanks (of the 4th Tank Battalion) to deal with troublesome enemy machine-guns. In a quarry on the river bank east of the village a party from the 16th Battalion aided by a tank flushed the regimental commander and headquarters staff of the 157th Regiment (117th Division).⁶⁸ The battalion crossed the Luce, and abreast of the 13th and 14th reached the Green Line by 8:15 a.m. Almost immediately the attacking battalions of Brig.-Gen. Griesbach's 1st Brigade leapfrogged the 3rd Brigade units and were on their way to the Red Line.⁶⁹

In this second stage the advance of all three battalions followed the same pattern. On several occasions they were held up by the fire of German machine-guns advantageously sited on the high ridges or concealed in the small woods that interspersed the grain fields. Before their tanks caught up, the infantry had only the support of their own Lewis guns in dealing with these.[†] Canadian casualties were light, most of the losses coming from German artillery fire. By eleven o'clock the 2nd Battalion, south of the Luce, had reached its objective and established outposts on the high ground east of Cayeux. In the centre the 4th Battalion, advancing astride the river bed, cleared Cayeux without meeting much opposition; while on the Brigade left the 3rd Battalion, having run into trouble in the deep ravines that entered the Luce valley from the north, made good its portion of the Red Line by 11:30.⁷¹

By this time General Macdonell's front had narrowed considerably, so that the 2nd Brigade (Brig.-Gen. Loomis) was able to advance to the Blue

* The former was scheduled to take part in the advance from the Green to the Red Line; the latter was on loan to the 3rd Brigade as a reserve.

† So rapid had been the advance that the 2nd Brigade C.F.A., detailed to provide the 1st Division with mobile artillery support, could not keep the enemy in range. During the morning its guns were in action east of Morgemont Wood, and in the late afternoon the batteries moved up to the banks of the Luce at the Red Line.⁷⁰

Dotted Line with only two battalions forward, each moving on a two-company front. The 7th Battalion, delayed by the absence of bridges over the Luce and the congestion caused by the long cavalry columns in their passage forward, came up through the 1st Brigade's right wing an hour and a half later. There was no longer any organized enemy resistance, though the assaulting companies had still to contend with isolated machine-gun nests and sniping from the more determined elements of the rapidly retreating enemy.⁷² By half-past one the 10th Battalion, attacking north of the Luce, had worked through the village of Caix and captured its final objectives in the old Amiens Outer Line. An hour later the arrival of the 7th Battalion at the Blue Dotted Line completed the 1st Division's task.⁷³

German losses had been very great. Thanks to the good work done by the heavy artillery supporting the Canadian attack, many troops of the 117th Division had been pinned in their shelters until overrun. Resting battalions, thrown in piecemeal, had suffered heavily in attempting to stand and even more severely in the subsequent retreat. Examination after the battle showed that the neutralization of German bakeries had been very effective. The Canadians captured many batteries that had not fired a shot, although there were some cases of German gun crews being credited with firing until the last round before they deliberately destroyed their pieces. According to official German sources the 117th Division was virtually wiped out.⁷⁴ In an effort to bolster resistance opposite the centre of the Canadian front, the German Second Army was thrusting in the 119th Division, borrowed, like the 1st Reserve Division, from the neighbouring Eighteenth Army. Farther north the exhausted 109th Division, which, as we have noted, had been relieved by the 117th only a short time before, on the morning of the 8th, was rushed forward from corps reserve to Hambonnières, and thrown into action opposite the Canadian left. It was evening before the 119th Division arrived, but by 8:40 p.m. it could report having plugged the last gap in the Second Army's front, in the area Caix-Beaucourt.⁷⁵

The advance of the 2nd Canadian Division on the Corps left on 8 August took place over more favourable ground than that assigned to the rest of the Corps. The rolling plateau, largely covered by grain crops, which in some places had already been harvested, afforded little cover to the enemy except in the villages and where an occasional wooded gully ran back from the River Luce. Of these villages, the one thought most likely to prove troublesome was Marcelcave, adjoining the Amiens-Chaulnes railway and just short of the Green Line objective. Since Marcelcave was out of range of most of the field artillery, a forty-five-minute bombardment by heavy guns was arranged to be fired while the infantry worked their way around on either side.⁷⁶ The divisional commander, Major-General Sir Henry Burstall, planned to use in order the 4th, 5th and 6th Brigades in the successive phases of the advance to the Blue Dotted Line.

When the assault went in at 4:20 a.m., with the 18th Battalion on the right and the 19th next to the railway, the mist, as it had done in other sectors, prevented the tanks (of the 14th Tank Battalion) from giving immediate support. Within half an hour, however, these were well on their way and doing a good job in helping to knock out hostile machine-guns. Early in its advance on the 4th

Brigade's right a company of the 18th Battalion (which found its tank support "one of the finest features of the day") was able to aid the 14th Battalion (of the 1st Division) in the capture of Morgemont Wood, which lay south of the inter-divisional boundary. A number of machine-guns fell into Canadian hands, and by the time the 18th Battalion reached the Green Line, it had overrun a battery of 5.9-inch howitzers and another of 77-millimetre guns.⁷⁷

In the meantime the progress of the 19th Battalion had been accelerated by the parallel advance along the railway of two companies of the 21st Australian Battalion, whose Lewis guns effectively cut down German opposition in front of the Canadians.⁷⁸ "Almost better than could be hoped for" was the way in which a 2nd Canadian Division report was to describe this cooperation by the Australians.⁷⁹ Entry into Marcelcave after the bombardment was relatively easy, though there was stiff fighting, in which the supporting 21st Canadian Battalion was involved, before the village was finally cleared. Farther along the railway lay the villages of Wiencourt and Guillaucourt, which were in the sector of the 148th Regiment-the left wing of the 41st Division - and at 8:20 a.m. the 5th Brigade (Brig.-Gen. J.M. Ross) passed through to deal with these in the second phase of the operation.⁸⁰

The main opposition met by the 24th Battalion, on the Brigade left, and the 26th on the right, still came from scattered machine-gun posts, whose positions could not be sufficiently defined to be engaged by the artillery. It was difficult for the tanks to deal with these, as the mist had risen and the fighting had advanced out of range of protective smoke-screens. There were costly tank casualties from German batteries firing over open sights; and those that took evasive action by dodging about the country soon found themselves short of petrol. It took longer to clear Pieuret Wood and Snipe Copse, east and south-east of Marcelcave, than it did to secure Wiencourt, the first of the two villages in the 5th Brigade's path. A mile to the east fairly heavy fighting developed in and around Guillaucourt. The 18-pounders of the 5th Brigade Canadian Field Artillery, which had moved forward to Marcelcave, gave useful support, being supplemented by five German field- pieces captured in Pieuret Wood.⁸¹

It was about 2:15 p.m. when the 5th Brigade reached its Red Line objective. By half-past two the three batteries of the 5th Brigade C.F.A. had moved up to positions just west of Guillaucourt to support the final advance by the 6th Infantry Brigade. (Before the day ended every battery in the artillery brigade had taken up new positions at least five times in support of the rapidly advancing infantry.)⁸² British units of the 1st Cavalry Division had taken the lead, and following them the 29th (on the left) and 31st Battalions crossed the Red Line at 4:30 p.m. Apart from some hostile shelling, opposition was negligible. The Canadian infantry passed through a British cavalry regiment a thousand yards short of the outer Amiens defences and, by early evening, were firmly established on the Blue Dotted Line. North of the railway, however, where the 15th Australian Brigade had not reached its objective, there remained a small

pocket of resistance opposing the Canadian left. That night a patrol of the 29th Battalion cleared up the trouble, capturing four machine-guns, so that contact with the Australians was restored next morning.⁸³

For the Germans opposite this part of the Canadian Corps front operations of 8 August had been as costly as to their neighbours farther south. The 41st Division, facing the 2nd Canadian and 2nd Australian Divisions astride the railway, was officially reported as having sacrificed all its front and support battalions, "as well as the entire artillery down to trifling remnants" (in fact only three guns). Reserve units had been reduced to seven infantry and three machine-gun companies.⁸⁴

Our account of the operations of the 1st and 2nd Divisions has taken us forward on the Corps left and centre to the Outer Amiens Defence Line. We left the 3rd Division at the Red Line, from where the attack on the Corps right was to be carried forward by the cavalry and by the 4th Canadian Division.

As the 7th Brigade dug in at the Red Line in the forenoon of 8 August, its troops were treated to the unusual but heartwarming sight of massed cavalry forming up for the attack. The Cavalry Corps (commanded by Lieut.-General Sir Charles Kavanagh) had begun moving off from its assembly area south-west of Villers-Bretonneux at about seven that morning, the 1st Cavalry Division on the left behind the 2nd Australian and 2nd Canadian Divisions, and the 3rd Cavalry Division (led by the Canadian Cavalry Brigade) on the heels of the 1st and 3rd Canadian Divisions.⁸⁵ The Canadian Cavalry Brigade, commanded by Brig.-Gen. R.W. Paterson, was accompanied by two companies of Whippet tanks-32 in all. The brigade crossed to the south bank of the Luce at Ignaucourt, and the right flank reached the Roye road shortly after 10:30 a.m. and established contact with Brutinel's armoured cars. Lord Strathcona's Horse then advanced astride the Roye road with the Royal Canadian Dragoons on their left. In the Canadian path lay the villages of Beaucourt-en-Santerre and Le Quesnel, roughly one-third and two-thirds of the distance to the Blue Dotted Line; the 7th Cavalry Brigade, moving up the valley of the Luce, would come in turn to Cayeux and Caix.

Moving across the inter-army boundary, the Strathcona advanced guard squadron encircled Fresnoy-en-Chaussée, and captured 125 prisoners there. Shortly afterwards, however, the enemy reoccupied the village. Beaucourt, which the Germans were already evacuating, presented no problem and yielded 300 prisoners; but in the wood to the east a stand by the Regiment Bellman was aided by fire from south of the Roye road, where the French had not yet secured Fresnoy. As a result Beaucourt Wood remained for the time in German hands.⁸⁶ A mile to the north, British cavalry were more fortunate in capturing Cayeux Wood after a short, sharp fight.⁸⁷

In the meantime the 4th Canadian Division had begun passing through the 3rd at 12:40 p.m., about two hours behind the cavalry. On the right, next to the Amiens-Roye road, was the 11th Brigade (Brig.-Gen. Odium), directed on Le Quesnel, with the 12th Brigade (Brig.-Gen. MacBrien) keeping pace on the left. About a mile east of the Red Line the leading battalions of the 11th Brigade came

up with the mounted units, in the vicinity of Beaucourt.⁸⁸ Each of the division's supporting tanks of the 1st Tank Battalion-the new Mark V Star, capable of transporting a score of men in addition to the crew-carried an infantry officer, a scout, and three machine-gun detachments (two Lewis, of three men each, and one Vickers, of five men)-thirteen men in all, besides the tank crew.⁸⁹ The plan was for the tanks to make straight for the Blue Dotted Line, where they would drop their passengers. Half would then remain forward while the others drove back to assist the main body of the infantry.⁹⁰

But this scheme to transport foot-soldiers in tanks did not work out well. Jolted about in their cramped quarters, the men suffered severely from the unaccustomed heat and fumes from the engines; many became sick, and a number fainted. More than half of the infantry detachments were obliged to seek fresh air and follow on foot.⁹¹ But there was worse to be faced than a lack of fresh air. A single German battery hidden a thousand yards south of Beaucourt Wood knocked out ten tanks. Eleven machines reached the objective; but because of unexpectedly strong German fire coming from north and east of Le Quesnel, seven of these picked up their infantry again and withdrew with them some 1500 yards.⁹²

North of the Luce the British cavalry had reached the final objective by one o'clock. The greatest advances had been made in the centre, where the 6th, followed by the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, took advantage of the shelter afforded by the valleys of the Luce and one of its tributaries to reach the Blue Dotted Line. They had all but cleared the south bank of the river by half-past two, an hour before the left wing of the 4th Division's tank-infantry force arrived.⁹³ Over on the right in the sector of the French 31st Corps, thanks partly to the efforts of a platoon of the R.C.R. and elements of the Independent Force, the village of Mézières (a mile south-west of Beaucourt) was now in French hands. But trouble lay ahead of General Watson's right wing, for the German reoccupation of Fresnoy meant that Le Quesnel was now defended to a depth of more than a mile to west, south and east.⁹⁴

Earlier that day German machine-guns in Beaucourt Wood had shown their superiority over Canadian sabres, and now these same guns were blocking the advance of the 11th Brigade and the right flank of the 12th. Three tanks detailed to help the 11th Brigade's 54th Battalion were set on fire or otherwise disabled. Without waiting longer for artillery or other support, the battalion commander personally led two platoons in a costly but partially successful attack on the wood. Aided by this action on their right flank the 102nd Battalion assaulted strongly and in hard fighting cleared the wood by half-past four, capturing 160 Germans. The 75th Battalion had passed through the 54th about an hour earlier; but the heavy machine-gun fire with which the Germans in Le Quesnel and Fresnoy were sweeping the flat fields forced the C.O. to rule out a frontal attack on the objective. Accordingly as night fell the brigade dug in a mile north-west of Le Quesnel. Events were to show that this was the only part of the entire Corps front where the first day's objective was not reached on the 8th.⁹⁵

Facing considerably lighter opposition, Brig.-Gen. MacBrien's units had made better progress through country most of which had been swept by the cavalry. At first the 78th Battalion had met heavy fire from machine-guns north of Beaucourt Wood, but had overcome these with tank and artillery support. This success owed much to the achievement of "C" Company, commanded by Lieutenant J. E. Tait, M.C. Inspired by his courageous leadership in knocking out an enemy machine-gun post single-handed, his men captured twelve machine-guns and took a score of prisoners. (Tait, who was killed three days later, was posthumously awarded the V.C.)⁹⁶ A thousand yards from the final objective the 72nd Battalion passed through the 78th, and pressing forward by short platoon and section rushes, reached the Blue Dotted Line at 6:15. On the left the 38th Battalion made such good time that the 85th, assuming the lead in the final stages, was on its objective by half-past four.⁹⁷

Little time was lost in the 4th Division's relief of the cavalry as the infantry began consolidating the day's gains. The 11th Brigade took over from the Canadian Cavalry Brigade about five o'clock, and an hour later the 7th Cavalry Brigade withdrew from the positions which it was holding jointly with the 12th Infantry Brigade in the Blue Dotted Line south of the Luce.⁹⁸ In their new stand Major-General Watson's infantry were covered by their own field artillery. The 3rd Brigade C.F.A., after completing its tasks in the opening barrage, had moved up to the Red Line during the afternoon; by eight that evening its batteries were deployed about Beaucourt, ready to fire a barrage on Le Quesnel. Plans made for an early morning attack on that village held good promise of fulfilment, for the menace to flanking enemy fire from across the French boundary had been removed in late evening when troops of the 31st Corps supported by light tanks captured Fresnoy.⁹⁹

On General Currie's left, towards the Somme, the Australians had reached most of their objectives by 1:30 p.m., but progress on their extreme northern flank had been seriously handicapped by British reverses north of the river. The heavy fighting in which all the divisions of the 3rd Corps had been involved since the opening of the Germans' March offensive had taken a serious toll, resulting in a lack of experienced officers and N.C.O.s. to lead the young recruits brought up to fill the ranks of the stricken infantry units. On top of this the German attack of 6 August and the counter-attack of the 7th had brought further losses and disorganization. The result was that the 3rd Corps, fighting through some of the most difficult country on the entire Fourth Army's front, was unable to take much more than its first objective, a mile short of its final goal. Because of this the 4th Australian Division on the Corps left, after occupying the Amiens trenches, was compelled to withdraw its northern posts some 500 yards from the final objective.¹⁰⁰

More far-reaching in its effect than the setbacks on the Fourth army's flanks was the failure to employ the cavalry to exploit the general success.

Because of difficulties in transmitting orders* and an apparent reluctance by Cavalry Corps Headquarters to act without instruction from the Fourth Army a great opportunity was lost. Fighting ahead of the infantry in the final phases, by early afternoon of 8 August the cavalry had (except, on the extreme right, east of Le Quesnel) gained a footing in the Amiens Outer Defence Line across the whole of the Canadian Corps front. But there the advance had stopped. In the meantime, at 12:30 General Rawlinson's Major General, General Staff had sent instructions to the G.O.C. Cavalry Corps that the cavalry should not halt at the Blue Dotted Line, but push on eastward towards the general line Chaulnes-Roye. But it was 4:15 p.m. before such orders, relayed by Cavalry Corps Headquarters, reached the frequently moving headquarters of the 1st Cavalry Division. Attempts in the late afternoon to push patrols towards Chaulnes failed, for the Germans had dug in strongly along the line Rosières-Vrély, some two thousand yards east of the Blue Dotted Line. The 3rd Cavalry Division, as we have seen, had been checked in front of Le Quesnel. The 7th Cavalry Brigade on the divisional left, however, reached the Dotted Blue Line before three o'clock; but an attempt by the 2nd Cavalry Division to pass through and push on eastward failed. At 5:20 p.m. General Kavanagh ordered his 3rd Division to hold on to the line it had reached until the infantry came up.¹⁰¹

Although the day's operations by the Fourth Army and the French First Army had attained somewhat less than complete success, the enemy had suffered its greatest defeat since the beginning of the war.¹⁰² From north of the Somme to south of Moreuil the German line had been thrown back as much as eight miles in the Canadian sector and up to seven on the Australian front. On the flanks the French had advanced a maximum of five miles, and the British two. The cost of all these gains had been remarkably light. The Fourth Army's casualties were approximately 8800, exclusive of tank and air losses. Canadian casualties totalled 3868–1036 killed, 2803 wounded, and 29 taken prisoner. The enemy admitted that his forward divisions between the Avre and the Somme had been "nearly completely annihilated", while his troops north of the Somme had "suffered severely". Official German figures gave the Second Army's casualties as "650 to 700 officers and 26,000 to 27,000 other ranks.... More than two-thirds of the total loss had surrendered as prisoners."[†] Allied forces had destroyed or seized more than 400 guns, many trench mortars and "a huge number of machine-guns".¹⁰⁴ The Canadian Corps was credited with capturing 5033 prisoners and 161 guns.¹⁰⁵

"August 8th", Ludendorff was to write, "was the black day of the German Army in the history of this war."¹⁰⁶ German morale had been struck an irreparable blow. "Everything I had feared, and of which I had so often given

* It had been impossible for cable layers to keep up with the rapid advance of the two leading cavalry divisions. Even Cavalry Corps Headquarters moved forward beyond the limit of voice transmission on the cable, and in communicating back to the Fourth Army and the Canadian and Australian Corps had to rely on telegraphy messages and wireless.

† British records show the total number of German prisoners to be about 15,000, which is less, not more than two-thirds of the Second Army's total casualties.¹⁰³

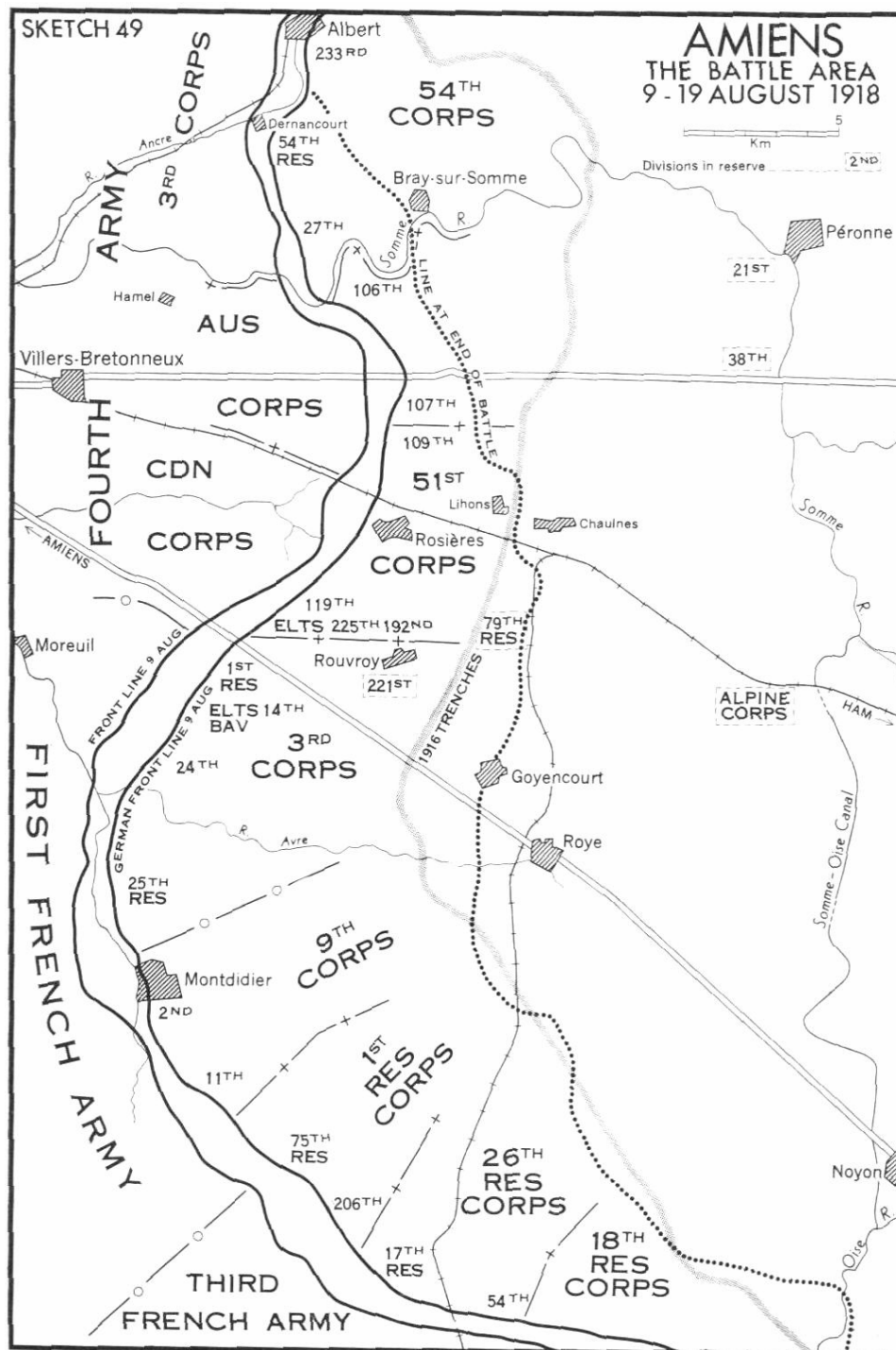
warning”, he declared pessimistically, “had here, in one place, become a reality.” No longer could he hope to resume the offensive or find any strategic expedient in which German forces might be employed to advantage. Even the Kaiser was now convinced that as a result of the failure of the German July offensive and the defeat on 8 August the war could no longer be won.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, on 10 August, when Ludendorff was reporting the disaster to the Kaiser, the latter had interjected: “We have reached the limits of our capacity. The war must be terminated.”¹⁰⁸

The Advance Slows Down, 9 August

“Having secured the old Amiens defence line. . .“ the British G.H.Q. operation order for 9 August began, “the Fourth Army will push forward tomorrow and establish itself on the general line Roye-Chaulnes-Bray-sur-Somme-Dernancourt.”¹⁰⁹ This line ran directly northward opposite the Canadian sector, angling to the north-west across the Australian and British fronts. To reach it would require an advance of nine miles on the Army right, but barely a mile on the extreme northern flank. On the right, the French were to continue to push eastward towards Roye, at the same time extending their sector of operations to their right by attacking on a sixteen-mile front reaching from Montdidier south-east to Authail. The British cavalry would continue to operate on the Fourth Army’s right flank in such a way as to assist the French advance, and-in the words of General Rawlinson’s order of the 8th (untimed but probably issued late at night)-”to gain the objectives allotted to the Canadian Corps”, the general line Roye-Hattencourt-Hallu. The Canadian right and left boundaries remained the Roye road and the Amiens- Chaulnes railway. General Currie and General Butler, G.O.C. 3rd Corps, were to select their own zero hours, and the Australian Corps in between would advance its flanks to conform with these timings.¹¹⁰

Surprise, of course, was out of the question. During the fighting on 8 August and throughout the following night, the Germans, reacting quickly, had brought up seven divisions from reserve. Elements of three of these were introduced opposite Canadian troops-from north to south the 119th Division at Rosières and Vrély, the 1st Reserve behind Le Quesnel, and the 82nd Reserve at the Franco-Canadian boundary. Other formations were on their way. The 261st Reserve Regiment (79th Reserve Division) arrived at Beaufort on the afternoon of the 9th; and the next day the 221st Division established itself astride the Roye road in the rear of the 1st and 82nd Reserve Divisions. Although British Intelligence had once rated two of these divisions “poor”, all five were now considered to be of average calibre.¹¹¹

An unfortunate change of mind at Fourth Army Headquarters was to cause considerable disruption to Canadian planning at the corps and divisional level, bringing back into action a timed division that had been heavily committed on the opening day of the battle, and, what was more serious, delaying the attack on 9 August for more than five hours, thereby giving the enemy that much



additional time to bolster his resistance. At 4:30 on the afternoon of the 9th General Rawlinson came to General Currie's advanced headquarters at Gentelles (three miles south west of Villers-Bretonneux). Currie was away visiting divisional headquarters, but the Army Commander informed the Canadian Corps B.G.G.S., Brig.-Gen. N.W. Webber, a British officer, that he was making the 32nd Division from army reserve available for operations with the Canadian Corps next day. On the strength of this decision plans were completed for the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions to attack at 5:00 a.m. on a front of one brigade each, while on the Corps right, after the 4th Division had cleared the corner next to the Roye road, the British division would pass through to advance on a two-brigade front.

But General Rawlinson's staff apparently felt that the situation was too satisfactory to warrant committing the Army's second-line divisions yet.¹¹² At 6:30 p.m. Big.-Gen. Webber received a wire from General Rawlinson's M.G.G.S. (the Army Commander's chief executive officer), cancelling the order respecting the 32nd Division, and calling him back to Dury to receive further instructions by telephone. Because of blocked roads it was half-past eight by the time Webber reached Dury, where he learned that the M.G.G.S. was "very irate with Army Comdr for daring to give away 32nd Divn and with myself [Webber] for aiding and abetting".¹¹³ The countermanded order meant that the 3rd Division, which had been relieved only that afternoon, had to be brought forward again to undertake the role intended for the 32nd Division. General Currie's headquarters worked through the night preparing fresh orders, which, because of the unreliability of wires forward had to go out by despatch-rider and motor car. They did not reach the divisions until four or five in the morning, by which time the original zero hour had been postponed to 10:00 a.m. on the 9th.

The immediate task set down in General Currie's new orders was for the 4th Division to secure Le Quesnel and the southern end of the Blue Dotted Line, after which the three remaining Canadian Divisions would continue their attacks.¹¹⁴ The 3rd Division's advance would be adjacent to the Roye road, keeping touch with the French on the right-its sector included the villages of Folies and Bouchoir. The 1st Division in the Corps centre was directed on Beaufort, Warvillers and Rouvroy; on its left the 2nd Division had to capture Rosières and Vrély, before pushing on towards Méharicourt and Chilly.¹¹⁵ In the 4th Division's sector the 75th Battalion began its attack at 4:30 a.m. For a time machine-gun fire from Le Quesnel and the high ground to the south held up the advance; but within an hour the battalion had successfully stormed these positions and driven the Germans from the village. There was more fighting in the adjoining Le Quesnel Woods, and at noon the extreme right of the objective, beside the Roye road, was still in German hands. Farther north bombing parties and tanks had by 11:00 a.m. reduced an enemy pocket between the 75th Battalion and the 87th, which had come up on the left, and sealed other gaps in the line, but not without the loss of two of the five supporting tanks, knocked out by an anti-tank gun.¹¹⁶

Revised orders for the day's operations issued by General Currie's advanced headquarters half an hour before the 4th Division's attack confirmed that the Canadian objectives would be considerably short of the Roye line-on the right as much as four miles short. The amended zero hour of 10:00 a.m. had to be postponed for a number of reasons.¹¹⁷ Enemy rearguards still occupied the right of the Outer Amiens Defence Line, where the 3rd Division was to pass through the 4th. The front of the timed 3rd Division was reduced to that of a single brigade and the 1st and 2nd Divisions had to shift to the right, taking wider frontages. As they side-stepped, a bombardment from German heavy guns hindered the readjustment. Neither division found it possible to get its troops into their new positions before 11:00. A second postponement to permit the necessary regrouping of artillery was followed by a third and fourth, as details of the original plan had to be hastily modified. There were similar delays across the entire army front, and in the Canadian Corps only the 6th Brigade on the left got away at eleven o'clock, without its supporting tanks. For most of the Canadian brigades it was past one o'clock before any advance began, and the 3rd Division, attacking with only the 8th Brigade, did not resume operations until 2:00 p.m.¹¹⁸ By that time French troops south of the Roye road had advanced past Le Quesnel, to make this flank more secure.¹¹⁹

Over on the Corps left, the 6th Brigade's expectation of stubborn resistance was well-founded. As the 29th and 31st Battalions advanced side by side up the long slope towards Rosières they were met by a hail of bullets from machine-guns sited in the village and along the Rosières-Vrély road. They had also to face a counter-barrage of shrapnel and high explosive from the enemy's artillery, while the whole brigade front was swept with enfilade fire from the unprotected flanks. An agonizing hour was to pass before five tanks came forward, and with no mist to shield them these made good targets for hostile guns and anti-tank rifles. Three were soon out of action. After an enforced pause the infantry fought doggedly forward again, and with better results because of help on either flank.¹²⁰ By noon the 5th Brigade had begun its attack on General Burstall's right, while an advance by the Australians along the railway was easing the pressure from the north.¹²¹ The surviving tanks, assisted by trench-mortar detachments, took out one machine-gun nest after another, enabling the 31st Battalion, on the brigade right, to work around the south side of Rosières. There was aid too from overhead, as British aircraft bombed and machine-gunned German posts. By 1:15 p.m., the battalion, helped by the last remaining tank before it too was knocked out, had cleared its half of the village, while the 29th Battalion was mopping up on the left.¹²²

The 5th Brigade, attacking with the 22nd and 25th Battalions, soon found that a report by a contact patrol of the R.A.F. that the Germans were retiring in disorder from Vrély was premature. From the outskirts of the village came a hail of machine-gun bullets that made an advance over the open ground out of the question. Instead small scouting parties followed by Lewis guns worked their way forward along ditches and sunken roads to outflank the enemy posts and take them with enfilade fire. By such tactics Vrély was secured, and

soon after three o'clock the 5th Brigade, joined at last by its tanks, was continuing eastward on Meharicourt.¹²³ At about the same time, a direct hit by an enemy shell on Brigade Headquarters killed the brigade-major and the liaison officer from the division, and seriously wounded Brig.-Gen. Ross. Lt.-Col. T.L. Tremblay, C.O. of the 22nd Battalion, took over the brigade.¹²⁴

North of Rosières the Australians had made a corresponding advance which enabled the 6th Brigade to resume its attack. Within the hour the 29th Battalion had driven the Germans from a sugar factory 1000 yards to the east. The 27th and 28th Battalions then went into the lead. Helped by its tanks the 5th Brigade quickened its pace. Shortly before five, the capture of Méharicourt by the 22nd Battalion completed a hard day of fighting, which had brought the French-Canadian unit its second V.C. of the war. On the morning of 8 August, when the 22nd Battalion was engaged in mopping-up operations west of Wiencourt, Lieutenant Jean Brillant, MC., had rushed and captured a troublesome enemy machine-gun post. Though wounded he continued in action, and during the attack on Vrély next day he led a party of two platoons in an assault which resulted in the capture of fifteen machine-guns and 150 prisoners. He was again wounded, but he refused to leave his company, and shortly afterwards organized a charge against a German four-inch gun that was engaging the battalion over open sights. Again he was wounded, this time mortally. In the words of the citation that accompanied the award of the Victoria Cross to Brillant, throughout the day his wonderful example had "inspired his men with an enthusiasm and dash which largely contributed towards the success of the operations".¹²⁵

The 1st Division reached its reduced objectives without much difficulty. The 2nd Brigade, operating on the 5th Brigade's right, had to side-step 2500 yards to the south before jumping off. It advanced largely unsupported by either tanks or artillery. The 8th Battalion met its most serious resistance from machine-guns firing out of Hatchet Wood and small copses beyond. On its right, the 5th Battalion found the ground, which was very flat, and masked with growing crops, well suited to section rushes covered by machine-gun fire. During the day's advance the Victoria Cross was won by three gallant non-commissioned officers of the brigade - Sergeant R.L. Zengel, M.M., of the 5th Battalion, and Corporal F.C. Coppins and Lance-Corporal Alexander Brereton of the 8th. In earning this high award each man at great personal risk boldly attacked and silenced one or more German machine-gun posts, thereby saving his comrades from heavy casualties.¹²⁶ The village of Warvillers in the right of the brigade sector was occupied without much opposition, and as the assaulting battalions neared the Méharicourt-Rouvroy road shortly before dusk, they received valuable if belated assistance from tanks of the 4th Tank Battalion, and from whippets on loan from the 1st Cavalry Division.¹²⁷

In the southern half of General Macdonell's sector, it was 1:15 p.m. (9 August) when the 1st Brigade attacked, the 1st Battalion (on the right) passing through the left of the 11th Brigade north-west of Le Quesnel. Throughout the operation Brig. Gen. Griesbach's brigade was assisted by three batteries of

Vickers from the 1st Battalion Canadian Machine Gun Corps; though on this day, as on 8 August, the advance proved too rapid for the machine-gunners to give effective close support. Not that the brigade's progress was free of delays and diversions. On the left the 2nd Battalion repeatedly came under fire from old British trenches on either side of Beaufort. After supporting tanks had broken this resistance the infantry quickly cleared the village. The 1st Battalion was obliged for its own good to take Folies, south of the divisional boundary, and hold it with a small force until the 3rd Division came abreast. The 4th Battalion then passed through, and by half-past five the brigade had secured most of the Rouvmoy-Folies road. Part of Rouvroy, where both the 2nd and 4th Battalions had gained a hold, was still in German hands. Brig.-Gen. Griesbach then ordered his remaining reserve, the 3rd Battalion, into an evening attack, and by 9:20 the village had been cleared of Germans. Both the 1st Division and the 2nd, which had halted on a line 500 yards east of Méharicourt, pushed posts well forward during the night.¹²⁸

On General Currie's extreme right the 8th Brigade's forward battalions passed through the 11th Brigade shortly after 2:00 p.m. Led by three tanks of the 5th Tank Battalion the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles headed south-eastward from Le Quesnel towards Folies, achieving good results by sections making short rushes.¹²⁹ Fifty minutes later the 5th C.M.R., next to the Amiens-Roye highway, set out with four tanks, its objective the village of Bouchoir, three miles down the road. By 4:15 the 4th C.M.R. had linked up with the 1st Division in Folies and, according to the reports of returning wounded, was "meeting little resistance and ... getting ahead fast." But the progress of the 5th C.M.R. was being delayed by enemy machine-guns which still covered the Roye road immediately south-east of Le Quesnel. South of the road French forces were held up at Arvillers, and the 5th C.M.R. were preparing to form a defensive flank with a detachment of Brutinel's Independent Force, before attacking the town. A beet-sugar factory at the junction with the side road to Arvillers was the scene of stiff fighting before the enemy withdrew under the impetus of a tank-infantry attack. Full kit, including rolled greatcoats, on enemy dead along the Roye road gave evidence of the recent arrival of German reinforcements.¹³⁰

Bouchoir fell to the 5th C.M.R. at five o'clock, and shortly afterwards the Germans were reported retiring from Arvillers. A platoon of the Mounted Rifles entered from the north and held the village until French troops arrived about seven o'clock. Meanwhile the 4th C.M.R. had reached an old British trench line running from Bouchoir through Rouvroy to Méhamicourt.¹³¹ It marked the edge of the area of defences occupied before the 1916 Battles of the Somme. Though the trenches were badly broken down, enough wire remained to enable the Germans to make of them very formidable machine-gun positions. East of Arvillers a gap between the Canadian Corps and the French First Army was filled by British cavalry and light tanks, together with elements of the Canadian Independent Force.¹³² The French First Army's offensive on the 9th had been notably lacking in results, and more than once Marshal Foch urged General Debeney to quicken his pace, and to push the 31st Corps forward "with drums

beating on Roye".¹³³ That night the French resumed their advance and established firm contact with the Canadian right flank in front of Bouchoir.

Though the first day's impetus had not been maintained, on this second day of the battle the Canadians had made advances of up to four miles, their French neighbours doing slightly less. The average gain for the Fourth Army was three miles - about half the distance to Roye and Chaulnes, the objectives originally prescribed for the second day. The advance had lacked the clockwork precision of the opening day. There had been too much countermanding of orders with a resulting disunity that had led to brigades attacking at different times and under different conditions. Fortunately the defence was similarly uneven, and the enemy made no serious attempt to counter-attack. Nevertheless resistance had been stronger than expected, and was becoming still stronger. Canadian casualties for 9 August numbered 2574, about two-thirds of the previous day's total. On the other hand the Australian Corps between the Amiens-Chaulnes railway and the Somme, more heavily engaged than on the opening day of the battle, had doubled its casualties with a figure of 1310.¹³⁴

As new German reserves arrived by train, bus and lorry, to be thrown piecemeal into the battle, the remnants of the formations battered by the Allied attacks - on the Canadian front the 41st, 117th and 225th Divisions - were gradually withdrawn. As a result of these movements, by the afternoon of 9 August the thirteen divisions of the British Fourth Army were facing thirteen German divisions and part of a fourteenth. These comprised the remnants of eight divisions in the line on 8 August and five newly inserted divisions, of which two had been exhausted previously and had been awaiting removal.¹³⁵ There were German fears that the British Fourth Army's penetration into the front of the Second Army would outflank the Eighteenth Army, opposite the French. Accordingly late on the ninth, after a long telephone consultation with Ludendorff, Army Group Rupprecht ordered the commander of the Eighteenth Army to withdraw some half dozen miles.¹³⁶ On the home front the German communique for 9 August, reporting that "the enemy had broken in south of the Somme on a broad front", spread panic among the German people and their allies. From Vienna the senior German representative at Austro-Hungarian Headquarters urged Ludendorff to tone down further admissions of defeat "if not on account of the German public, then for the sake of our Allies".¹³⁷

The End of the Battle, 10-11 August

There could be little hope that August 10, the third day of the battle, would result in any further spectacular gains, though Field-Marshal Haig's orders to his armies prescribed the untaken objectives of the previous day-the line Roye-Chaulnes-Bray-Dernancourt. The enemy was still reinforcing his front. During the day four fresh divisions appeared opposite the Canadian Corps-the 221st Division astride the Amiens-Roye road; the 121st between it and Hattencourt; the

Alpine Corps* between Hattencourt and Hallu; and the 38th Division in the vicinity of Chaulnes.¹³⁹

For these formations arriving so precipitately in the battle area there was little of the normal take-over of defended positions; yet they were fortunate in finding ground that was in itself a physical obstacle to a rapid advance by their opponents. A belt three miles wide pitted with shell-holes and befouled with tangles of barbed wire and the remains of old trenches overgrown with long concealing grass marked the position of the former Allied and German front lines before the German retirement to the Hindenburg Line in the spring of 1917. Here the new arrivals set up their machine-guns, ready to offer determined resistance to attackers who had not yet fully realized that the operation had suddenly reverted from open pursuit almost to the old pattern of trench warfare.[†]

General Currie's orders to the Canadian Corps set the hour of the renewed advance at 8:00 a.m. The 4th Division would relieve the 1st and 2nd Divisions in the left half of the Corps sector, now divided into two divisional sectors only. On the right the 3rd Division would be replaced by the British 32nd Division, which had finally been placed at Currie's disposal during the afternoon of the 9th.¹⁴¹

Before the 3rd Division was relieved, the 8th Brigade completed some unfinished business from the previous day. This was an attack on Le Quesnoy, a small hamlet two thousand yards east of Bouchoir. About midnight, three companies of the 2nd C.M.R. were lorried by the Independent Force to an assembly area near Bouchoir, and the attack went in at 4:20 a.m. By 6:30 the Canadians had captured the village, but soon had to break up a number of local counter-attacks.¹⁴² During the morning the 1st C.M.R., trailing the 2nd into Le Quesnoy, occupied old British trenches to the north-east. Meanwhile the French First Army, following up the withdrawal of the German Eighteenth Army, had found Montdidier in ruins. Troops on the left of the 31st Corps entered Erches, abreast of the Canadians.¹⁴³

The Canadian Corps resumed its advance at 9:30 on the 10th, the 32nd British Division (Major-General T.S. Lambert) passing through the 1st and 3rd Divisions, its two assaulting brigades directed on Parvillers and Damery. Pending the arrival of its own artillery - delayed until 10:30 a.m. by night bombing - the British division was supported by the 5th Canadian Divisional Artillery. On its left, the 4th Division, taking over the sectors of the 1st and 2nd (which passed into corps reserve), began to move forward at 10:15. On General Watson's right flank the immediate objective of the 10th Brigade, commanded by Brig.-Gen. R.J.F. Hayter, a British officer, was the village of Fouquescourt; the 12th Brigade had to take Maucourt and Chilly.¹⁴⁴

It was soon found that the Eighteenth Army's withdrawal in the French sector had not been matched on the front held by the German Second Army.

* The Alpine Corps was actually only on the establishment of one division.¹³⁸

† The location of these trenches was unknown to the assaulting battalions; large-scale maps showing the trench systems were not available in time for the advance beyond the Blue Dotted Line.¹⁴⁰

Prisoners captured by the 3rd Canadian Division during the morning of the 10th spoke of orders to hold at all costs a line (the old pre-Hindenburg Line position) on the western edges of Andechy (in the French sector), Damery, Parvillers and Fouquescourt. A subsequent order given at 8:15 a.m. by the 51st Corps for a retirement by the 221st, 79th Reserve and 119th Divisions to positions on either side of Hattencourt, was countermanded by 10:30 by General von der Marwitz as fresh reinforcements arrived. It appears that during the night of 9-10 August the Second Army had reported in a pessimistic sense. Next morning, however, a newly designated Army Chief of Staff appeared, and in accordance with the views of higher command authorities issued orders for an immediate counter-attack on the entire Army front with a resolute follow-up.¹⁴⁵

The Germans were able to hold most of this line throughout the day. By midday they had checked the advance on all parts of the Corps sector, the 32nd Division and the right wing of the 4th Canadian Division being held up on the old British front and support lines. South of the Roye road units of the French First Army had been halted at Andechy.¹⁴⁶ That afternoon a squadron of the Fort Garry Horse captured the village and turned it over to the French,¹⁴⁷ but the latter were unable to go much farther. As might have been expected when horsemen are ordered to charge defended entrenchments, other attempts by the cavalry to advance brought little but casualties.¹⁴⁸ The Fort Garrys lost that day 45 all ranks and 112 horses.

During the morning the 32nd Division's right brigade captured La Cambuse, on the main road, and Square Wood (half a mile west of Parvillers). The left flank reached a point about half a mile west of Fouquescourt. As the day wore on the British units beat off sharp counter-attacks but could gain no more ground. There was particularly bitter fighting in the Bois-en-Equerre, from which all attempts to reach Damery, 1000 yards to the east, were hurled back. Ordering his troops to consolidate, General Lambert reported to Canadian Corps headquarters the need for fresh troops and careful artillery preparation before trying a further advance.¹⁴⁹

Troops of the 10th Canadian Infantry Brigade could make little progress through the wire and trenches of the old Somme defences east of the Méharicourt-Rouvroy road. Shortly after noon as they approached the next lateral road joining Maucourt and Fouquescourt, heavy machine-gun fire from both villages checked the 44th Battalion on the right and the 46th on the left. At the same time the 12th Brigade's 72nd Battalion was meeting resistance from Maucourt; while on Brig. Gen. MacBrien's left the 85th Battalion was under fire from north of the railway, where Lihons was still to be taken by the Australians. The 72nd drove the Germans out of Maucourt into nearby Chilly without much difficulty, but there was stiff fighting in the latter village before it was finally in Canadian hands, shortly after 12:30.¹⁵⁰

With Maucourt in possession the 10th Brigade was able to establish a line east of the Fouquescourt road early in the afternoon, though Fouquescourt itself was still stoutly defended. General Watson was concerned about this

situation on his right flank, where the attacking troops were confronted with the serious obstacle of well-manned trenches and uncut wire. Accordingly the guns of the 3rd Brigade C.F.A. and the 179th Brigade Australian Field Artillery were brought forward to deal with the German defences. With this support the 44th Battalion, attacking across an open field swept by machine-gun fire, forced an entry into Fouquescourt and in severe fighting drove out the defenders. By six o'clock the 44th had dug in just east of the village, the 47th Battalion coming up to extend the line to the left.¹⁵¹ Meanwhile in the 12th Brigade's sector, the 78th Battalion had passed through the 72nd to take a temporary hold on Hallu; but next to the railway the 38th Battalion, under heavy fire from Lihons on the open left flank, had reached only the Chilly-Lihons road. During the evening the 72nd Battalion was called on to beat off a strong German counter-attack coming in on Chilly from the north-east. The enemy had vigorously resisted Australian attempts to take Lihons, and at the end of the day's fighting General Monash's right was nearly three miles behind the Canadian left, which echeloned back towards it. Things had gone better north of the Somme, where the old Amiens Defence Line was reached on a broad front and an American regiment fighting with the British 3rd Corps pushed forward almost to Bray.¹⁵²

On the evening of 10 August General Rawlinson and General Debeney relayed to their respective armies orders issued by G.H.Q. for a resumption of the offensive next day. In view of the hardening of the enemy's resistance these appeared most optimistic. The French were to attack at dawn, their objective being the line of the Somme-Oise canal, which ran northward from Noyon, passing eight miles east of Roye.¹⁵³ The Fourth Army's task was to push forward to the long southward bend of the Somme between Ham and Péronne, and establish bridgeheads on the far bank. The Canadian Corps objective was the stretch of river between Offoy (three miles west of Ham) and St. Christ, eight miles downstream.¹⁵⁴ When orders reached the Cavalry Corps that it was to spearhead the Canadian advance, the Corps B.G.G.S. drove post-haste to Army Headquarters to remonstrate that the enemy's resistance was now very strong and that the ground over which the proposed advance was to be made was quite impassable for cavalry in any large numbers.¹⁵⁵

There is evidence of a growing divergence of opinion between Sir Douglas Haig and Marshal Foch as to the wisdom of continuing the Amiens offensive, though this was not to come into the open for a few more days. Nevertheless a passive resistance to the Generalissimo's orders was beginning to manifest itself on the 11th. In the course of the morning General Rawlinson telephoned General Currie to say that he did not wish the attack of the 32nd Division pressed very strongly if that would entail heavy losses. Currie, who recognized the inadvisability of trying to progress mainly by infantry fighting, recommended that operations should be slackened to give time to organize a set-piece attack on a broad front. Shortly after midday he cancelled a proposed attack by the 4th Division.¹⁵⁶ Before the day ended Rawlinson, after seeing Sir Douglas Haig at Villers-Bretonneux, told his corps commanders that the C.-in-C. had approved the Fourth Army's offensive being discontinued for the time being. It

would not be resumed until it had the support of all available artillery and an increased number of tanks.¹⁵⁷ Rawlinson left it to the discretion of corps commanders to make local improvements in the line which they were then holding.¹⁵⁸ As a general offensive, the Battle of Amiens ended on 11 August. The operations of the next three days were only local actions carried out in preparation for a renewal of contemplated large-scale attacks, both British and French, on the 15th and 16th. For reasons to be shown presently (below, p. 422) these did not materialize.

Some adjustments were made in the Canadian front line. Hallu, which marked the most easterly point reached by any formation of the Fourth Army, was given up. During the previous night and on the morning of the 11th the 4th Canadian Division had beaten off three counter-attacks launched against the village by the Alpine Corps,¹⁵⁹ and with the cancellation of a further advance it was not practical to maintain such an exposed position. The 78th Battalion was withdrawn, and both the 4th Division and the British 32nd consolidated a line which ran along the western outskirts of Damery and Parvillers, passing to the east of Chilly.¹⁶⁰ During the night of 11-12 August the two formations were relieved by the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions respectively.

A Lull in the Fighting

The next eight days saw no large-scale action on the Allied front. During the 12th, 13th and 14th, the 3rd Canadian Division, which had taken over the Corps right, was engaged in clearing the maze of enemy trenches between Fouquescourt and Parvillers. Except for the penetration south-west of Damery made by the 32nd Division on 11 August, the Germans still held the whole of their former trench network between the Roye road and Fouquescourt. By means of patrol encounters and local trench fighting, units of the 7th Brigade, working in close cooperation with the 9th Brigade on their right, slowly pushed forward to close in on Parvillers from both flanks.* On the 14th the P.P.C.L.I. gained an entry but could not occupy the village in the face of violent enemy reaction.¹⁶² Parvillers was finally secured on the 15th and held against counter-attack by the R.C.R. and the 116th Battalion (now commanded by Lt.-Col. G.R. Pearkes, V.C.).¹⁶³

On the same day the 52nd Battalion entered Damery, which had been the main centre of resistance in front of the 9th Brigade. The ease with which the village was taken pointed to a possible German ruse, which materialized in the afternoon with a violent shelling of Damery followed by an attack from two battalions of the 60th Regiment of the 121st Division. From positions to which

* In these operations two men of the 7th Brigade won the V.C. Sgt. Robert Spall of the P.P.C.L.I. won a posthumous award when with great heroism he held off with his Lewis gun a German counter-attack outside Parvillers on 13 August, enabling his platoon to withdraw safely from an isolated position. Pte. Thomas Dinesen (42nd Battalion) earned the coveted decoration by his sustained bravery and leadership during ten hours of hand-to-hand fighting on 12 August which ultimately resulted in the capture of more than a mile of enemy trenches north of Parvillers.¹⁶¹

they had temporarily withdrawn east of the village companies of the 52nd Battalion broke up the advancing waves, mowing down large numbers of Germans as they marched forward in massed formation. The enemy was driven back in disorder, leaving behind him some 200 prisoners and a great number of dead and wounded.¹⁶⁴

Having lost Damery, the enemy found the Bois-en-Z, north of the Roye road, untenable; it was soon afterwards occupied by French forces. The 3rd Division was now relieved by the 1st and went into reserve, General Macdonell taking over command of the sector at midday on the 16th. The improvement of the French position prompted a further advance by the left wing of the 31st Corps, in which the Canadian Corps cooperated. On 16 August, as the French launched an attack on Goyencourt, only two miles from Roye, General Currie ordered the 1st Canadian Division to push forward to Fresnoy-les-Roye and La Chavatte, with the 2nd Division (which had relieved the 4th Division on the 12th and 13th) assisting on the left. Accordingly that afternoon, on General Burstall's front, the 19th Battalion, reinforced by companies of the 18th and the 20th, occupied Fransart, between Fouquescourt and Hattencourt.¹⁶⁵ But in the 1st Division's sector three attempts by the 13th Battalion to get into La Chavatte failed in spite of substantial artillery support, nor could strong patrols penetrate to Fresnoy-les-Roye, both places being well within the enemy's main position. Not until the morning of the 17th, when 4th Brigade patrols had cleared troublesome trenches north of La Chavatte, could the 13th Battalion secure that village.¹⁶⁶ Attempts to reach Fresnoy were abandoned. On the 19th, the 4th Division, having replaced the 2nd Division on the Corps left, improved its position in a minor operation north of Chilly. During the afternoon the 87th Battalion won back some of the ground lost earlier by the Division east of the Chilly-Lihons road and held its gains against four counter-attacks that night.¹⁶⁷

This virtually ended active operations by the Canadian Corps east of Amiens. Roye and Chaulnes, which had marked the Fourth Army's objectives since the opening of the battle on 8 August, were not to fall to French forces for another eight days. As General Currie's formations began moving to new fields of endeavour they could look back with satisfaction on their recent achievements. Between 8 and 13 August the Corps had met and defeated elements of fifteen German divisions, completely routing four. By the 20th it had penetrated up to fourteen miles on a frontage which had widened from 7500 to 10,000 yards - an area of 67 square miles - and had liberated 27 villages. Captures included more than 9000 prisoners, nearly 200 guns of various calibres, and over a thousand machine-guns and trench mortars.¹⁶⁸ "This magnificent victory has been won", General Currie told the Corps in a special order on 13 August, "because your training was good, your discipline was good, your leadership was good." At the same time he warmly thanked staffs and supporting arms and services for their "splendid support and cooperation". These successes had been gained at a cost of 11,822 Canadian casualties (for the period 8 to 20 August). The greater part of this total, 9074, had been incurred on the four opening days of the offensive-3868 of them on 8 August.

Tank and Air Support, 8-11 August

Some German writers, possibly with a view to defending the prestige of their own troops, have been inclined to attribute the Allied success on 8 August largely to the tanks. Yet far from constituting a “massed tank” attack - such a use of armour had not been planned - the operation owed its success principally to the work of the infantry and the machine-gunners, valuably supported by the artillery, which throughout the course of the battle achieved and maintained a “definite ascendancy over the enemy’s batteries.”¹⁶⁹

This is not to deny that the presence of the armour enabled the advance to proceed more rapidly than would otherwise have been the case. It may be argued that the tanks, which were hampered early in the operation by fog and battle smoke, might have been used more profitably if they had been held back until later in the day; yet it is certain that their employment in the early stages kept down the Fourth Army’s infantry losses, which increased substantially as the number of supporting tanks diminished. The French, attacking without tanks, suffered far more heavily in proportion.¹⁷⁰

The general pattern had been for small groups of armour and individual tanks to deal with enemy machine-gun nests and other local resistance that was holding up the advance of the infantry. The 4th Canadian Division’s novel use of tanks to carry machine-gun teams forward appears to have exerted little influence on the battle, and the unfortunate experience of the riders was to make the idea of “armoured infantry” singularly repulsive to all foot-soldiers.¹⁷¹ The combination of medium tanks and cavalry proved equally unpromising. Their top speed of 8.3 miles an hour cut by more than half by ground conditions, the Whippets could not keep up with the horses when the latter were not being fired on; under fire, the cavalry could not follow the tanks. In isolated instances, however, medium tanks and armoured cars carried out independent offensive tasks with heartening results.¹⁷³ Whatever chance the mismated cavalry-Whippet force might have had of taking the Blue Dotted Line and exploiting beyond it depended largely on maintaining the momentum of the advance-and that hope, as we have noted, was dashed by the misunderstanding at Cavalry Corps Headquarters on the opening day of the battle (above, p. 407).

Between 8 and 15 August the Cavalry Corps suffered 887 casualties in personnel and lost 1800 horses;¹⁷⁴ the Canadian Cavalry Brigade reported losses of twelve officers and 233 men in the first four days of the offensive.¹⁷⁵ The toll on the armour was heavy indeed-only 145 tanks were fit for battle on the second day. After the opening day direct hits from German guns accounted for the great majority of the losses. Thirty-nine machines were knocked out on 9 August, and thirty more on the 10th.¹⁷⁶ Of 99 fighting tank casualties sustained between the 8th and the 13th by the 4th Tank Brigade (which was supporting the Canadian

* Armoured cars, exploiting success on the Australian front, shot up an advanced corps headquarters and captured the German defence plan for 25 miles of the Hindenburg Line. Although evidently prepared early in 1917 and not kept up to date, the document was useful in directing the subsequent bombardment of that position on to vital centres of defence.¹⁷²

Corps), 80 resulted from enemy fire while only 19 broke down or were ditched.¹⁷⁷

The role assigned to the Royal Air Force for the opening day of the battle had been one of interdiction - early morning attacks against the enemy's aerodromes on the Fourth Army front and evening and night bombing of the railway stations at Péronne and Chaulnes.¹⁷⁸ But a more attractive and profitable target appeared in the bridges over the Somme, with the result that no serious bombing of railway communications took place until the morning of the 10th. There were hopes that if the bridges, which served as gateways to and from the field of battle, could be put out of action, the Germans west of the Somme would be isolated. In all, on 8 August the R.A.F. made 205 bombing flights and dropped twelve tons of bombs in fruitless attempts to destroy the Somme spans. Forty-five British aeroplanes were shot down and 52 more rendered unserviceable. The bridges remained intact.¹⁷⁹

Attacks on the bridges continued in full force day and night until 13-14 August and thereafter took place intermittently. As opposition from German fighter craft increased it became necessary to transfer R.A.F. fighters from a bomb-carrying role to that of escort to the heavy bombers. Even after a total of 700 flights against them, the bridges were all still quite usable. There seems little doubt that a strict adherence to the original plan of attacking rail centres of communication would have brought greater profit. Yet though the bombing had failed in its object, some justification might be argued that it had forced the German air forces to fight under conditions not of their own choice, and there was consolation that the Allied losses in bomber crews were matched by the enemy's loss of some of his finest pilots.¹⁸⁰ On 10 August Germany lost her leading ace when Lieutenant Erich Loewenhardt (53 victories) collided with a comrade. Three days later Lieutenant Baron Lothar von Richthofen* (40 victories) received a wound which kept him from active duty for the remainder of the war.¹⁸²

The enemy's air service, though initially outnumbered, had reacted quickly to the Allied attack. As the morning fog of 8 August cleared, German fighter squadrons were ordered to abandon their customary high-flying defensive tactics in order to give all possible protection to their artillery observation and contact patrol machines. Soon, as they made contact with British bombers and fighters (carrying 25-pound bombs), the protection of the Somme bridges became their primary concern. Additional fighter units, including elements of the Richthofen Circus, were brought in and all squadrons were kept in the air as long as possible.¹⁸³ In the new 125-mph. Fokker DVII biplane the enemy possessed a magnificent weapon, without which, according to one German writer, "the tenacious and successful [air] resistance offered in the final months of the war would have been impossible."¹⁸⁴

* A younger brother of the late Captain Manfred von Richthofen, and acting commander of Fighter Wing No. 1. The second regular commander was Captain Wilhelm Reinhard (accidentally killed earlier in July) and the third and last, Lieut. Hermann Göring.¹⁸¹

After Amiens

Although by 13 August the Allied offensive had been definitely checked, the German leaders could no longer doubt that the initiative had passed from their hands. On that date, at a conference held at Spa with Field-Marshal von Hindenburg, Reichschancellor Count von Hertling and the Foreign Secretary, Admiral von Hintze, in attendance, Ludendorff, while opposing any voluntary surrender of ground,* admitted "that it was no longer possible to force the enemy to sue for peace by an offensive". Since the defensive alone could hardly achieve that object, the war would have to be ended by diplomatic means.¹⁸⁵ Hindenburg, on the other hand, derived some comfort from the fact that "the enemy had once more failed to extract all possible advantages from his great initial successes" and that German armies were "still standing deep in the enemy's country."¹⁸⁶ Next day, at a Crown Council presided over by the Kaiser, His Majesty ordered peace negotiations to be opened through the King of Spain or the Queen of the Netherlands.¹⁸⁷ It was also about this time that orders were issued calling off large-scale air attacks planned against the British and French capitals by German bombers using thousands of one-kilogram incendiary bombs. While it was proclaimed to the world that these cities were being spared on humanitarian grounds, there seems little doubt that the inevitability of a German defeat was the main reason for the cancellation of the attacks. Throughout the war British and French planes dropped some 14,000 bombs on German soil. A British plan to attack Berlin, however, failed to materialize owing to insufficient aircraft capable of such a mission.¹⁸⁸

In the meantime Allied plans on the Western Front were undergoing revision. As early as the evening of 11 August, as German resistance stiffened, Marshal Foch had shown himself willing to modify objectives and consider alternatives to further offensive operations on the Amiens front. At that time large-scale operations were due to be resumed on the 15th. But on the 13th General Debeney asked for and received a day's postponement of the assault by his army; and next morning General Rawlinson was given the same extra time in which to complete his preparations.¹⁸⁹ Sir Douglas Haig has revealed in his diary that he shamed Rawlinson's misgivings about attacking the well-prepared Roye-Chaulnes defences and that he was resolved that the French First and British Fourth Armies should merely "keep up pressure on that front" in order to hold the enemy's attention, while he prepared to strike elsewhere with the British First and Third Armies.¹⁹⁰

There is no doubt that Rawlinson was considerably influenced by representations made to him by General Currie, upon whose forces the burden of a major shame of a renewed offensive must fall. At a meeting on the morning of 14 August the Army Commander showed Haig a letter (accompanied by air photographs taken the previous day of the German positions) in which Currie set

* General von Lossberg, now chief of staff to General von Boehn (commanding the Ninth, Eighteenth and Second Armies), had failed in repeated attempts to persuade Ludendorff to put all available reserves immediately to work on repairing the Hindenburg Line with a view to a withdrawal to that position.

forth the arguments against renewing an operation which would “cost a great many casualties” without obtaining adequate results. He suggested that if the attack were found to be absolutely necessary it should be postponed in order to allow time to “recover the element of surprise.” He recommended that an alternative, and better, course would be to withdraw the Canadian Corps from the line, and after resting it for a few days employ it on the Arras front in a surprise attack in the direction of Bapaume. An advance in this sector coupled with an attack by the French from their present line, might well force the enemy to abandon his positions west of the Somme without the necessity of a frontal assault.¹⁹¹

This last suggestion was in keeping with Haig’s own ideas. An exchange of letters with Foch on the 14th brought no agreement about postponing operations at the Somme,¹⁹² and that evening a telegram from the Generalissimo asked Haig “once more to maintain the date already set.”¹⁹³ The Field Marshal, however, had made up his mind to limit the Somme attack to a series of set stages, and on the afternoon of the 15th he pressed his arguments at Foch’s advanced headquarters at Sarcus (twenty miles south-west of Amiens). “I spoke to Foch quite straightly”, his diary records, “and let him know that I was responsible to my Government and fellow citizens for the handling of the British forces.”¹⁹⁴ Foch’s resistance had already been weakened when he learned from General Debeney that morning that the projected attack on Roye “would certainly be difficult”, and even if mounted would leave the French forces too weak to maintain it. “I definitely came around to the opinion of Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig”, he wrote in his Memoirs, and he agreed that the Amiens offensive should not be pressed.¹⁹⁵

A new operation order issued by British G.H.Q. directed the Third Army, which was holding a nineteen-mile front north of Albert, without delay to “press the enemy back energetically in the direction of Bapaume”; the Fourth Army while continuing its preparations for an attack would be prepared to follow up any German withdrawal towards the Somme. Farther north the First Army would take advantage of any German retirement to exert pressure south-eastward from the Arras sector; under favourable conditions, it would attack Monchy-le-Preux and Orange Hill. The latter, it will be recalled, had been the proposed target of the cancelled Canadian attack at the end of July (above, p. 389).¹⁹⁶

In a letter confirming his acceptance of Haig’s proposals Marshal Foch made it clear that he was depending on the British operations to be developed with sufficient impetus to ensure a resumption of the thrust south of the Somme. He went on to thank Sir Douglas for his cooperation, which had completely freed the Amiens area and the Paris-Amiens railway. For an offensive north of the Aisne (below, p. 425) he was now going to transfer the French First Army from Haig’s command back to Pétain’s group of armies.¹⁹⁷ Accordingly the Franco-British boundary was shifted northward to the Amiens-Chaulnes railway, and the relief of the Canadian Corps by French troops began on 19 August.¹⁹⁸

On the night of 19-20 August the 2nd Canadian Division began moving northward by bus and train to rejoin the First Army in the Arras sector, followed the next night by the 3rd Division. A number of days were to elapse before the

1st and 4th Divisions made the move. General Currie closed his Headquarters at Dury on the 22nd. During the day he called on a number of senior commanders and had the satisfaction of being told by General Byng that the Canadian performance at Amiens was “the finest operation of the war”.¹⁹⁹