

policy governing the conduct of the operations of the British Armies in France. Orders accordingly were issued early in December having for their object immediate preparation to meet a strong and sustained hostile offensive. In other words, a defensive policy was adopted, and all necessary arrangements consequent thereon were put in hand with the least possible delay.

*Extension of the British Front.*

(3) Since the month of September, 1917, pursuant to a decision taken by the British Government towards the end of that month, negotiations had been proceeding with the French authorities regarding the extension of the front held by the British Armies. After considerable discussion on the subject, it was finally decided that the British should relieve the French troops on my right as far as the vicinity of the village of Barisis, immediately south of the River Oise. The additional front to be taken over by me amounted to over twenty-eight miles.

This relief, which was to have taken place in December, was delayed until January in consequence of the further development of the Cambrai battle. In the meantime, the French forces which had co-operated so successfully on the left of the British in Flanders had been withdrawn, and French troops again assumed responsibility for the coastal sector at Nieupoort.

By the end of January, 1918, the relief of the French as far as Barisis had been completed without incident. At that date the British Armies were holding some 125 miles of active front.

*Man-power and Training.*

(4) The strenuous efforts made by the British forces during 1917 had left the Army at a low ebb in regard both to training and numbers. It was therefore of the first importance, in view of the expected German offensive, to fill up the ranks as rapidly as possible and provide ample facilities for training.

So far as the second of these requirements was concerned, two factors materially affected the situation. Firstly, training had hitherto been primarily devoted to preparation for offensive operations. Secondly, the necessity for maintaining the front line systems of defence and the construction of new lines on ground recently captured from the enemy had precluded the development of rear line systems to any great degree.

Under the new conditions the early construction of these latter systems, involving the employment on every available man on the work, became a matter of vital importance. In consequence, it was difficult to carry out any elaborate course of training in defensive tactics. On the other hand, in the course of the strenuous fighting in 1916 and 1917, great developments had taken place in the methods of conducting a defensive battle. It was essential that the lessons learned therein should be assimilated rapidly and thoroughly by all ranks.

At the same time a change took place in the organisation of the forces. Under instructions from the Army Council, the reorganisation of divisions from a 13 battalion to a 10 battalion basis was completed during the month of February. Apart from the reduction in fighting strength involved by this reorganisation, the fighting efficiency of units was to some extent

affected. An unfamiliar grouping of units was introduced thereby, necessitating new methods of tactical handling of the troops and the discarding of old methods to which subordinate commanders had been accustomed.

The difficulties with which we were faced were accentuated by the increase in the British front described in the preceding paragraph. Meanwhile, in marked contrast to our own position, the large reserves in the Western theatre, which the enemy was able to create for himself by the transfer of numerous divisions from the East, enabled him to carry out extensive training with units completed to establishment.

*Preparations for Defence.*

(5) Orders issued early in December, as stated above, had defined the defensive policy to be adopted and the methods of defence. A vast amount of work was required to be done in the construction of defences, old systems had to be remodelled and new systems created. The construction of new communications and the extension of old, more especially in the area South-East of Arras which the enemy had devastated in his retirement last year, involved the building of a number of additional roads and the laying out of railways, both narrow and normal gauge. Work of this nature was particularly necessary on the Somme battle field and in the area recently taken over from the French.

All available men of the fighting units, with the exception of a very small proportion undergoing training, and all labour units were employed on these tasks. Though the time and labour available were in no way adequate if, as was suspected, the enemy intended to commence his offensive operations in the early spring, a large portion of the work was in fact completed before the enemy launched his great attack. That so much was accomplished is due to the untiring energy of all ranks of the fighting units, the Transportation Service and the Labour Corps.

*Arrangements for Co-operation with the French.*

(6) In addition to our own defensive schemes, completion of arrangements for the closest possible co-operation with the French was recognised to be a matter of great importance and urgency. A comprehensive investigation was undertaken into the various problems connected with the co-operations of the two allied forces. Plans were drawn up in combination with the French military authorities and were worked out in great detail to meet the different situations which might arise on different parts of the allied front. Measures were taken to ensure the smooth and rapid execution of these plans.

Among the many problems studied by the Allied Staffs, those involved by a hostile offensive on the line of the Somme River and the passage of that river by the enemy had been worked out. The plans applicable to such a situation had been drawn up and were ready to be put into execution when required.

*Operations during the Winter.*

(7) In order to ensure the greatest possible concentration of effort upon training, reorganisation and defences, and also in order to allow my divisions the maximum amount of rest after the continuous fighting of 1917, only such minor enterprises were undertaken by the