

12 FROM BAPAUME TO PASSCHENDAELE

soldiers in the world, and hardly equalled, perhaps, in all the history of war, against terrible gun-fire and innumerable machine-guns, in storms and swamps, in bodily misery because of the mud and wet, in mental suffering because of the long strain on their nerve and strength, with severe casualties because of the enemy's fierce resistance, but with such passionate and self-sacrificing courage that the greatest obstacles were overcome, and the enemy was beaten back from one line of defence to another with large captures of prisoners and guns until, in the middle of November, the crest of Passchendaele was gained.

Before the first day of the battle the 5th Army, with the 1st French Army on its left, below the flooded ground of St.-Jansbeck, crossed the Yser Canal and seized 8000 yards of the enemy's trench system. During that night the pioneer battalion of the Guards, working under fierce fire, built seventeen bridges across the canal for the passage of our troops on the day of assault. On that day, July 31, at 3.50 in the morning, battle was engaged on a front of fifteen miles from Boesinghe to the River Lys, where the 2nd Army was making a holding attack on our right wing. The German front-line system of defence was taken everywhere. Our troops captured the Pilkem Ridge on the left, Velorenhoek, the Frezenberg Redoubt, the Pommern Redoubt, and St.-Julien north of the Ypres—Roulers railway, and were fighting forward against fierce resistance on both sides of the Ypres—Menin road. They stormed through Sanctuary Wood and captured Stirling Castle, Hooge, and the Bellewaerde Ridge, and by the end of the day had gained the crest of Westhoek Ridge. On the 2nd Army front the New-Zealanders carried the village of La Basseville after close fighting, which lasted fifty minutes, and English troops on their left captured Hollebeke and difficult ground north of the Ypres—Comines Canal. Over 6000 prisoners, including 133 officers, surrendered to us that day.

It was in the afternoon of the first day that the luck of the weather was decided against us and there began those heavy rain-storms which drenched the battlefields in August and made them dreadful for men and beasts. All this part of Flanders is intersected by small streams or "beeks," filtering through the valleys between the ridges, and our artillery-fire had already caused them to form ponds and swamps by