

THE WAR OF 1914

# Military Operations: of BELGIUM

*in defence of the country,  
and to uphold her NEUTRALITY.*

*1/- net*

Report compiled by the Commander-in-Chief of the Belgian Army,  
for the period July 31st to December 31st, 1914.



P. D. Sykes

LÉGATION DE BELGIQUE

INDIA HOUSE.

KINGSWAY, W.C.

ATTACHÉ MILITAIRE.

Londres, le

19

No.

Prière de rappeler le Numéro  
dans votre Réponse.

With the compliments of James P. nt Hatch,  
Belgian Military Attache.

Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2008 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation

<http://www.archive.org/details/warof1914militar01belg>

THE WAR OF 1914

*Belgium*

# MILITARY OPERATIONS OF BELGIUM

IN DEFENCE OF THE COUNTRY,  
AND  
TO UPHOLD HER NEUTRALITY.

Report compiled by the Commander-in-Chief of the Belgian Army.

*(For the period July 31st to December 31st, 1914.)*

---

LONDON:  
W. H. & L. COLLINGRIDGE,  
THE CITY PRESS,  
148 & 149, Aldersgate Street, E.C.  
1915.

LONDON :  
Printed by W. H. & L. COLLINGRIDGE,  
"City Press," 118 & 119, Aldersgate St., E.C.

*“There should be operations in combination  
and in junction with the Armies of  
the Guaranteeing Powers.”*

*“. . . Belgium will provide for the defence  
of her fortified places.”*

(APPEAL BY BELGIUM TO THE POWERS WHO GUARANTEED  
HER NEUTRALITY, AUGUST 4TH, 1914.)

I.—PRELIMINARIES

II.—DEFENCE OF LIÉGE

III.—OPERATIONS IN COMBINATION WITH THE ARMIES OF THE GUARANTEEING  
POWERS, DURING THE PERIOD 6TH TO 20TH AUGUST

IV.—DEFENCE OF NAMUR

V.—OPERATIONS IN COMBINATION WITH THE ARMIES OF THE GUARANTEEING  
POWERS, 20TH AUGUST TO 27TH SEPTEMBER

VI.—DEFENCE OF ANTWERP

VII.—OPERATIONS IN COMBINATION WITH THE ARMIES OF THE GUARANTEEING  
POWERS, 6TH TO 15TH OCTOBER

VIII.—JOINT OPERATIONS WITH THE ARMIES OF THE GUARANTEEING POWERS:  
BATTLE OF THE YSER

IX.—GENERAL SUMMARY





## I.

### PRELIMINARIES.

The first military measure adopted by Belgium in consequence of the diplomatic conflict which divided Europe in July 1914, was the placing of her army on a reinforced peace footing, by calling up three classes of the men liable to military service.

**29th July :  
Army raised  
to reinforced  
peace  
strength.**

This was merely a measure of precaution. Owing to the neutrality of Belgium, the dispositions which she might be called on to adopt were essentially protective, and only intended to meet possible eventualities.

The Belgian army, on its ordinary peace footing, consisted of only one class with the colours. Such a force was obviously inadequate at a moment of international political tension. Belgium, owing to its small area, is in reality nothing more, in a military sense, than a frontier zone, and the covering troops which the neighbouring great powers had assembled in their frontier zones had a considerably higher peace strength. The raising of the Belgian Army Divisions to the reinforced peace strength only placed her on an equality, in this respect, with her neighbours.

But the Belgian forces fell far short, both in men and in guns, of the figures contemplated in the recent reorganisation of the army, which had only just been

commenced, and which had been intended to provide a total of 350,000 men. As this figure would only be reached in 1918, the Belgian Government had so arranged its scheme that, even during the transition period, the army could at any moment be mobilised and assembled without difficulty. As regards equipment, heavy artillery was entirely lacking; the country was at the moment in the throes of far-reaching military changes.

**31st July :  
Mobilisation  
of the army  
and plan of  
campaign.**

PLATE No. I.  
[P. 9.]

Two days later, on the 31st July, at 7 p.m., owing to the exceptional gravity which the situation had assumed, mobilisation was ordered by Royal Decree.

In time of peace the headquarters and garrisons of the six Army Divisions and of the Cavalry Division, of which the Field Army was composed, were distributed as follows :

1st Division: Ghent (garrisons of Ghent, Bruges, Ostend and Ypres).

2nd Division: Antwerp (garrison of Antwerp).

3rd Division: Liège (garrisons of Liège, Hasselt and Verviers).

4th Division: Namur (garrisons of Namur and Charleroi).

5th Division: Mons (garrisons of Mons, Tournai and Ath).

6th Division: Brussels (garrison of Brussels).

The Cavalry Division had its headquarters at Brussels.

The concentration areas had been selected in accordance with defensive requirements, and with a strict observance of the obligations imposed on Belgium by her neutrality, as defined by the treaties of 1839.

The 1st, 3rd, 4th and 5th Divisions acted as advanced-guard divisions, and

were stationed respectively in each of the regions through which danger might threaten Belgium, thus:—

The 1st, or Flanders, Division faced England;

The 3rd, or Liège, Division faced Germany;

The 4th and 5th Divisions faced France; the 4th being placed so as to meet a possible attack on Namur, the 5th to oppose an advance from the direction of Maubeuge-Lille.

Each of these advanced-guard divisions was intended to offer the first resistance to attack, and thus to gain time for the transfer of the five other divisions to the threatened portion of the territory.

The defensive system of Belgium further included three fortified places: Antwerp, forming an entrenched camp and place of refuge; Liège and Namur, designed to oppose the enemy's advance, and to act as bridge-heads and points of support. It was thus necessary to divide the army into fortress troops and field army; of the fifteen classes called to the colours, the seven oldest were allotted to the service of the fortresses, while the eight youngest were assigned to the field army.

The sole object of all these measures, as the Minister for Foreign Affairs on the 1st August informed the King's representatives at the foreign capitals, was "to enable Belgium to fulfil her international obligations; they could not possibly have been inspired by a feeling of defiance towards any of the Powers."

On the 2nd August, at 7 p.m., while mobilisation was in progress, the German Minister at Brussels handed to the Belgian Government a note, which the latter was given twelve hours to answer.

**2nd August :  
German Note  
demanding  
passage for  
her armies  
through  
Belgium.**

From the military point of view, this document contained two noteworthy paragraphs :—

1. The German Government was stated to have received reliable information to the effect that French troops intended to march on the Meuse by Givet and Namur.

2. In order to forestall this expected attack which threatened the safety of the Empire, the German Government proposed to send its troops across Belgian territory, and requested Belgium not to oppose their passage, and especially to refrain from organising resistance at the Meuse fortresses, and from destroying the roads, railways, tunnels or bridges.

It must be remarked that the Note had no immediate influence on the concentration of the army, which remained distributed in accordance with the military exigencies dictated by the neutrality of the country. The troops occupying posts on all the frontiers received orders to open fire on any foreign detachment which might set foot on Belgian soil.

This attitude on the part of the military authorities faithfully reflected the political attitude taken up by the King's Government, which had replied to the German Note that, on the one hand, "it would oppose with all the means at its disposal any attempt made by Germany to infringe the rights of Belgium"; and that, on the other hand, "if, contrary to all expectations, a violation of Belgian neutrality were committed by France, Belgium would fulfil all her international obligations, and her army would oppose the most vigorous resistance to the invader." At the same time, Belgium had declined the military aid which the Minister of France had offered, on the grounds that the Government had not yet appealed to

the guarantee of the Powers, and reserved to itself the right to decide on its course of action later.

During the night of 3rd to 4th August it became certain that the German troops intended to force a passage through Belgium.

Measures were promptly taken at Headquarters to deal with the new situation.

Orders were issued for the destruction of the railways, tunnels, bridges, etc., on the lines of approach likely to be used by the German troops. The Military Governors of the several provinces were instructed no longer to consider any movements of French troops on Belgian soil as acts of violation of neutrality.

In accordance with the scheme of defence, the 3rd Division was to resist the enemy, supported by the fortified position of Liège; covered by it, the remaining Divisions were to advance against the invader, with the exception, however, of the 4th Division, whose task was to defend Namur. The 1st Division was sent from Ghent to Tirlemont, the 2nd from Antwerp to Louvain, the 5th from Mons to Perwez, and the 6th from Brussels to Wavre.

These movements were to be covered: firstly, by the Cavalry Division which, after concentrating at Gembloux, was ordered to Waremme; secondly, by a mixed brigade of the 3rd Division sent to Tongres, and thirdly, by a mixed brigade of the 4th Division which was moved to Huy.

The movements of concentration, begun on the 4th August, were completed next day; they were carried out with rapidity and regularity, partly by road, partly by rail.

**4th August :  
Violation of  
the frontier  
by the  
German  
troops.**

The King, in virtue of the Constitution, assumed the supreme command of the army.

On the morning of August 6th the army was ready to move. Each of the Field Army Divisions at that moment constituted a complete unit, provided with all its administrative services, and comprising either three or four mixed brigades, one regiment of divisional cavalry, one regiment of divisional artillery, one battalion of engineers (two companies), one section of field telegraphists, and one divisional transport corps. Each mixed brigade consisted of two regiments of three battalions, one group of three field batteries, one machine-gun company and a detachment of gendarmerie.

Finally, the Cavalry Division had two brigades, one cyclist battalion, one artillery group of three batteries, one cyclist pioneer and pontoon company, and one divisional transport corps.

The total strength of the field army amounted to 117,000 men. It was subsequently increased by 18,500 volunteers posted to the field army.

As soon as the concentration had taken place it was possible to organise the defence of the territory.

**The  
principles  
governing  
the plan of  
defence.**

In the appeal addressed by Belgium on the 4th August, after the violation of her frontier, to the Powers which had guaranteed her neutrality, she had declared in what manner she intended to defend her territory.

“There should be,” said the Government of the King in this appeal, “operations in combination and in junction with the armies of the

Guaranteeing Powers designed to resist the forcible measures employed by Germany against Belgium, and at the same time to guarantee the maintenance of Belgian independence and integrity in the future.

“Belgium is glad to be able to declare that she will provide for the defence of her fortified places.”

From the German Note of August 2nd it was easy to infer that if the German armies passed through the country, the Meuse would be, not the northern limit, but the axis, of their offensive movement towards France, so that evidently forces very superior in numbers to the Belgian army were about to cross Belgium.

Hence the following principles were laid down for the conduct of operations:

*1. Whenever the army should be faced by very superior forces:*

1. To remain as far forward as possible on good defensive positions, barring the passage of the invaders, so as to protect as much as possible of the country from invasion.

2. The army thus forming the advanced guard of the French and British armies, was to wait in these positions till the junction with those armies could be effected.

3. Should this junction not have been effected before the arrival of the enemy's main bodies, the army was not to be exposed to certain defeat, which would necessarily involve the occupation of the territory, and therefore:

(a.) The army unsupported was not to engage the mass of the enemy's troops in battle;

(b.) The army was not to allow itself to be surrounded, but was, on the

contrary, to manœuvre in such a manner as to keep a line of retreat open with a view to an ultimate junction with the French and British forces, for joint action with these latter.

*II. Should the army be faced by forces no more than equal to its own:*

The enemy was to be attacked at the most favourable moment, either if his positions were too extended and not sufficiently prepared for defence, or if his strength had been reduced momentarily.

Further, the fortified positions of Liège and Namur, as well as the entrenched camp of Antwerp, were to be defended in any case.

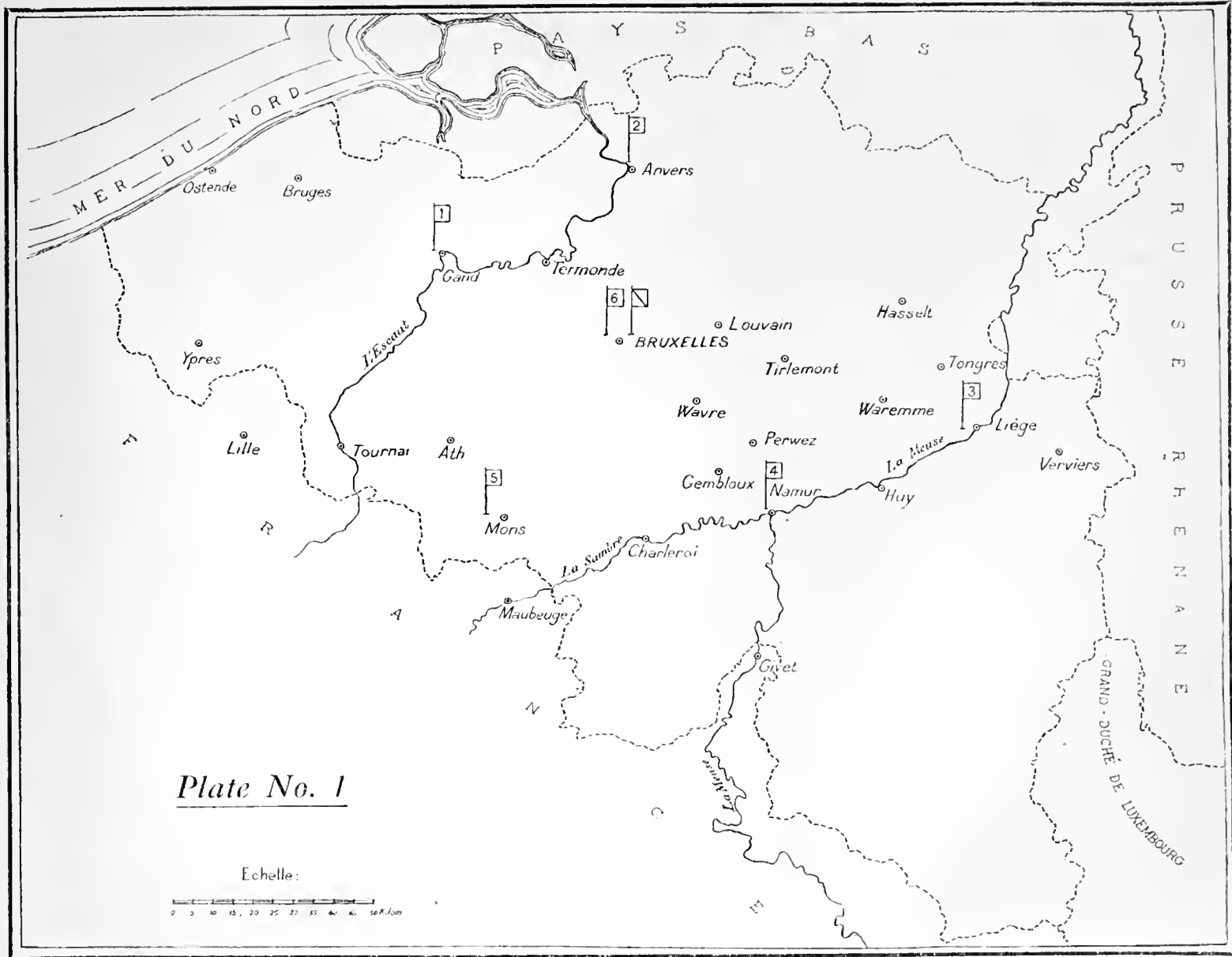
When, on the 6th August, the field army had been concentrated, and the Headquarters Staff was in a position to apply the above principles, the general situation had already been seriously affected by military events which had occurred on the Meuse and in front of Liège.



# *Plate No. 1*

CONCENTRATION AREAS OF THE MOBILISED ARMY.







## II.

### DEFENCE OF LIÉGE.

On the morning of the 4th August, two divisions of German cavalry (2nd and 4th Divisions, consisting of about twelve regiments) had crossed the frontier and invaded the district of Herve.

Passing to the north of the fortified position of Liège, they pushed on towards the Meuse. At Visé they found the bridge destroyed and the passages of the river guarded by the 2nd battalion of the 12th Regiment of the Line.

This battalion resisted attacks made by very superior forces, supported by artillery fire and by infantry transported in motor cars. But the enemy extended his movement towards the north; two Hussar regiments crossed the Meuse at the Lixhe ford. The Belgian forces, their left wing having been turned, retired onto the line of the Liège forts.

Behind the cavalry, German troops of all arms, belonging to the VIIth, VIIIth, IXth, Xth and XIth Army Corps, entered Belgium; the heads of their columns reached the line Bombaye-Herve-Remouchamps on the afternoon of the 4th; while still further in rear the concentration of the IIIrd and IVth Army Corps was reported at St. Vith and to the north of that place (nine miles south of Malmédy).

At that moment seven army corps, or about 300,000 men, were collecting thus on the invasion roads, which were blocked by the fortified position of Liège.

**4th August:  
First  
contacts.**

PLATE No 2.  
[P. 15.]

**5th August.  
Defence of  
the section  
of the  
Meuse below  
its junction  
with the  
Vesdre.**

On the 5th August a bridge was thrown over the river at Lixhe, and advanced cavalry units began to appear at Tongres. At the same time a German cavalry regiment came in contact at Plainevaux, south of Liège, with a squadron of the 2nd Lancers, which charged it, and lost three-quarters of its strength in the unequal encounter.

In the course of the morning the bearer of a flag of truce appeared before the Governor of Liège, and summoned him to allow the German army to pass. On the peremptory refusal of the Governor, the German corps proceeded to assault Forts Chaudfontaine, Fléron, Evegnée, Barchon and Pontisse. Although the attack was supported by powerful heavy artillery, it was everywhere repulsed with great loss.

The fiercest fighting took place between Fort Barchon and the Meuse. At this point the enemy had succeeded in penetrating the line; a vigorous counter-attack by the 11th Brigade checked his advance and threw him back in disorder beyond his original positions. The attack on the section of the Meuse below its junction with the Vesdre had failed.

**Night of 5th/  
6th August :  
Defence of  
the section  
of the Meuse  
above its  
junction  
with the  
Ourthe.**

The section Ourthe-Meuse was then violently attacked by fresh troops during the night of the 5th to 6th August. At the same time a small party of the enemy's cavalry, consisting of two officers and eight men, made a desperate attempt in Liège itself against the person of the Governor of the fortress; the plot failed, and all who took part in it were killed.

Between the Ourthe and the Meuse, the attacks of the Xth German Corps forced the defenders of the intervals between the forts to retire. The available

troops of the 12th, 9th and 15th Brigades (the latter belonging to the 4th Army Division and sent from Huy) checked these attacks by means of counter-attacks.

Since the 4th August the troops of the 3rd Division had been engaged at all the points, successively, of a very extended front, repelling the desperate onslaughts of an enemy four times their superior in numbers, and they were in danger of being surrounded. They had, therefore, to be withdrawn to join the main body of the army, which by that time had completed its concentration. The forts continued to be held by their garrisons, but the Governor of Liège considered that they could now only play the part of isolated forts. He retained the general military command, and established himself at Fort Loncin at noon on the 6th August.

**6th August:  
Retirement  
of the mobile  
troops of the  
defence of  
Liège to join  
the main  
body of the  
army.**

The field troops assembled between Forts Loncin and Hollogne, and reached the Geer on the same evening; they then joined the main army on the Gette, the operation being uninterfered with by the enemy, of whom only a few Lancer patrols were encountered.

On the occasion of the arrival of the Liège troops on the main position of defence, the King issued a General Order, in which he said:

“In the name of the Nation, I salute you, officers and soldiers of the  
“3rd Division and of the 15th mixed Brigade! You have performed  
“your duty, and you have done honour to our army, and have shown the  
“enemy what it costs to attack unjustly a people which, though peace-  
“loving, draws from the justice of its cause an invincible strength. Your  
“country has reason to be proud of you!

“Soldiers of the Belgian Army, do not forget that you are the advanced  
“guard of huge armies which are taking part in this gigantic struggle,  
“and that we are only waiting for the arrival of our brothers-in-arms to  
“march to victory.

“ALBERT.”

For several days after the departure of the 3rd Division, the forts continued to fire on any German troops who came within their radius of action. On the 12th August, however, at about noon, the bombardment by artillery of large calibre began against the defences, those on the right bank being the first to receive attention.

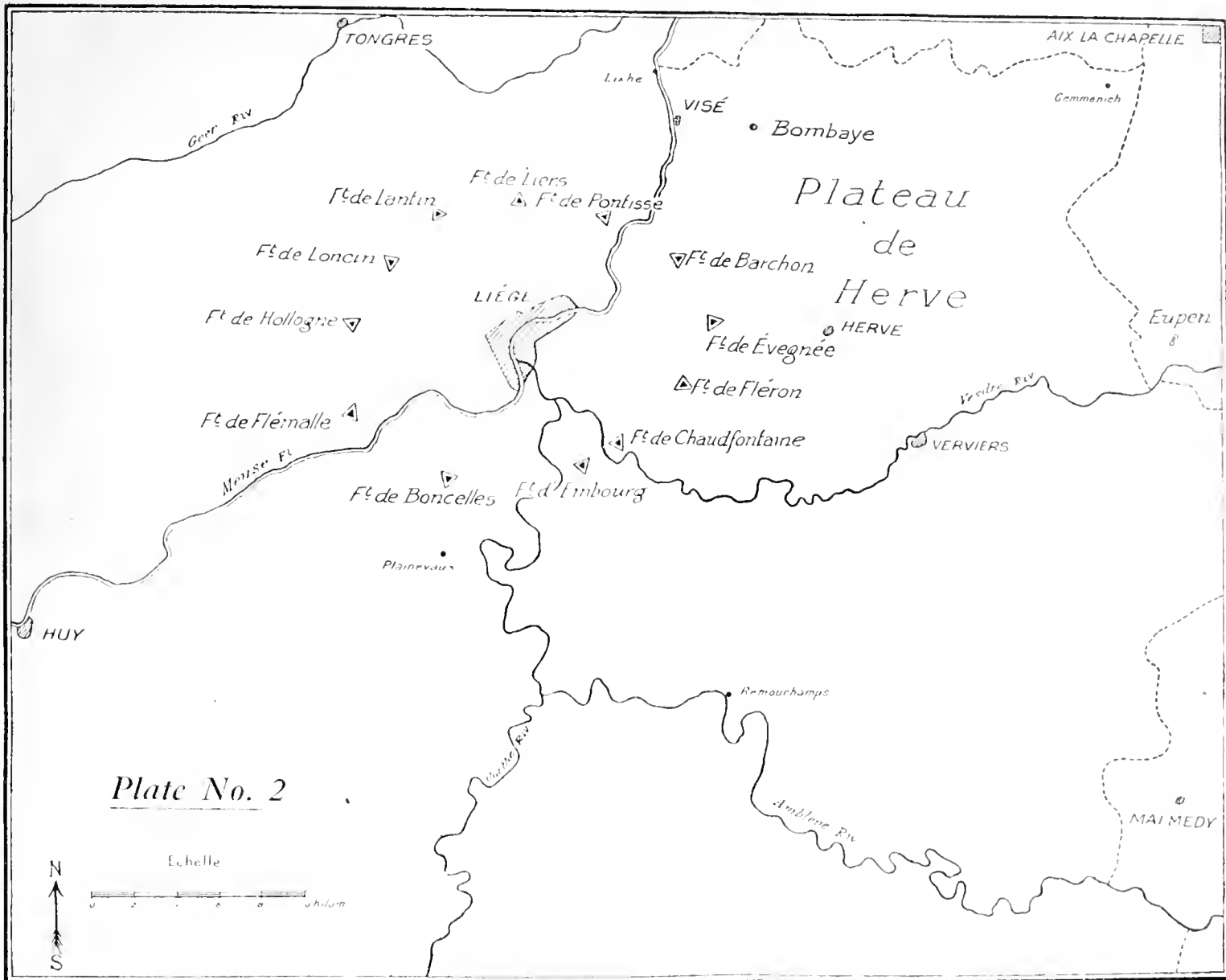
The last of the forts fell on the 16th and 17th August.



*Plate No. 2*

DEFENCE OF LIÉGE.







### III.

## OPERATIONS IN COMBINATION WITH THE ARMIES OF THE GUARANTEEING POWERS, 6th TO 20th AUGUST.

Let us glance at the general situation at the moment when, on the 6th August, the concentration of the army in the quadrilateral Tirlemont-Louvain-Wavre-Perwez, two marches distant from Liège, enabled the Army Command to decide on the plan of defence.

The 3rd Division, after defending Liège, was retreating on to the main body. The enemy had crossed the Meuse to the north of Visé, and had attacked the Liège position with three army corps; other corps were assembling to the east and south-east of Liège. Thus the enemy was in possession of the line of the Meuse towards Liège, and he had, in the immediate vicinity, forces greatly superior to those which could be brought against him.

Behind Liège, the first natural defensive line which the Belgian Army could occupy was that of the Gette, prolonged by the course of the Meuse between Namur and Givet.

This line of defence, with its left resting upon the Démer, protects a great portion of the Belgian territory, and bars the road to a German offensive such as that which seemed to be taking shape.

**6th August :  
Selection of  
the defensive  
position on  
the Gette.**

PLATE No. 3.  
[P. 27.]

The Belgian army was not strong enough numerically to occupy the whole of this line, and it was decided to hold only the course of the Gette and Namur. In this position it would be able to wait for the arrival of the French and British armies, if they could arrive in time, to occupy the space between the Gette and Namur and also the line of the Meuse above Namur.

Lastly, massed along the line of the Gette, the army, while covering the capital of the country—Brussels—was not threatened with being cut off from Antwerp, its base of operations. This latter circumstance was of vital importance, since the Belgian army could on no account risk being cut off from its base, where all its resources in provisions, munitions and supplies of all kinds were collected, and where the Government would have to retire to in case of need.

All these reasons decided the Army Command to keep the army in observation on the Gette, to entrench there and to wait on that line until the junction with the French and British forces should ultimately be effected.

The left of the army was to the north-west of Tirlemont, the right at Jodoigne. In first line were the 1st and 5th Army Divisions, and in second line the 2nd Division, at Louvain, and the 6th at Hamme-Mille.

When the 3rd Division joined the main body from Liège, it was placed in the first line between the 1st and 5th Divisions.

The front of these forces was covered by the Cavalry Division, which, originally at Waremmes, had been moved first to St. Trond, and then to the left of the army prolonging the line of the latter from north of Tirlemont nearly to Diest.

The 4th Division remained in the fortified position of Namur, not only with a

view to the defence of that place, but to hold it as a point of support for the line Gette-Meuse.

Lastly, the Liège forts were still occupied by their garrisons, while at Huy there was the 8th mixed Brigade, detached from the 4th Division to replace the 15th Brigade, which had been sent to Liège.

About the 10th August, there were in front of the Belgian lines bodies of German cavalry supported by battalions of rifles. Skirmishes took place daily with the Belgian advanced parties, and when the enemy became particularly active towards Hasselt and towards Diest, the Belgian cavalry division came in contact with these troops near Budingen and Haelen.

On the 12th August, the enemy's cavalry tried to force the passage of the Gette at Haelen. Six regiments belonging to the 2nd and 4th Cavalry Divisions, supported by the 7th and 9th Rifle Battalions and by three batteries, took part in this operation. Against these 4,000 sabres, 2,000 rifles and 18 guns, the Belgian cavalry division could only oppose 2,400 sabres, 410 cyclists and 12 guns.

**12th August:  
Action at  
Haelen.**

PLATE NO. I.  
[P. 29]

The enemy attacked at about 8.30 a.m., employing dismounted cavalry in some force, as well as riflemen. For nearly two hours the 3rd company of Carbineer Cyclists held them in check, supported at about 9.30 by the 1st company posted to the south of the village.

But at about 10 o'clock the German artillery came into action, and its fire soon rendered the outskirts of Haelen untenable, while the enemy was continually reinforced. The Carbineer Cyclists, after blowing up the bridge, retired on to the railway line, where they continued the action until noon.

At that moment four squadrons (two of the 4th regiment of Lancers and two of the 5th) were deployed, in rear of the 1st and 3rd companies of Carbineer Cyclists, about the farm of Yserbeek; on their left was the 1st Horse Artillery battery, escorted by two squadrons of the 5th Lancers, the two other batteries being in echelon north-east of Houtsem. The flanks were protected at Zelck by a squadron of the 4th Lancers and two platoons of cyclists, and at Velpen by two squadrons of the 2nd Guides; three squadrons of the 1st Guides were in reserve at the edge of the Blekkom woods.

At noon the enemy attacked simultaneously Zelck and the railway station at Haelen. He was driven back at Zelck, and came under artillery and machine-gun fire at Haelen. He then brought up fresh troops and threatened to turn the cyclists, who thereupon retired slowly towards the farm of Yserbeek.

It was about 1 p.m. when an attack was launched against the cyclists; dense lines of riflemen debouched from Haelen; the cyclists, who had been fighting for nearly five hours, fell back. Immediately a squadron of dragoons appeared and charged them; it was destroyed by rifle fire. The charge was repeated twice, and each time met with the same fate.

The enemy then put in his reserves, which deployed on the front Velpen to Liebroeck, supporting his riflemen everywhere by numerous machine guns, while his artillery engaged the 1st Horse Battery energetically.

The farm of Yserbeek was attacked and taken, and the enemy's success seemed to be assured, when, at about 3 p.m., the 4th mixed Brigade (four battalions of the 4th and 24th Line Regiments) arrived on the battlefield, having



left Haekendover at 9.30 a.m., and marched 16 miles under a very hot sun. The brigade reached Loxbergen during the fighting; six companies covered the movement on the right, a battalion attacked the farm of Yserbeek, and the last was held in reserve.

In spite of their fatigue these troops soon reached the farm of Yserbeek and the hamlet of Velpen, round which severe fighting took place. With great dash they penetrated into Velpen, where they found themselves under the fire of machine guns hidden in the houses.

The enemy's artillery energetically supported several counter-attacks, but the three batteries of the 4th Brigade, which came into action at 3.30, silenced them.

In the end, at 6 p.m., the enemy gave way, and retired on Haelen, leaving his dead and his wounded behind him.

The engagement at Haelen, favourable as it had been for the Belgians, was but an episode in the total of the German movements.

The Army Command watched these movements carefully by means of its Intelligence Department.

From reports received up to the 17th it appeared that :

In front of the left of the army the enemy was reported in the directions of Wilderen, St. Trond, Tongres, Hasselt, Herck St. Lambert, Lummen, Kermpt, Stockroy, Genck, Asch, Beeringen, Tessenderloo, Bourg-Léopold, and Moll, while very large numbers of troops had crossed by the bridges at Lixhe.

In front of the Belgian centre, strong bodies of the enemy were announced in most of the villages round Esemael, Landen, Waremmes and Hannut.

**18th August :  
The army,  
threatened  
by eleven  
hostile corps,  
and  
unsupported,  
retires  
towards the  
Antwerp  
position.**

PLATE NO. 5  
[P. 31.]

On the Belgian right flank the enemy had considerable bodies of troops about Huppaye, Jauchette and Piétrebais; German troops were crossing the Meuse at Ampsin, while others repaired the bridge at Huy and passed over the river at that place.

By the morning of the 18th August the situation had become extremely critical.

The day began with an engagement on the Belgian left. The Cavalry Division was attacked all along the front which it was holding, from Budingen to Diest, but resisted vigorously, especially at Diest. At 7 a.m., Budingen and Geet-Betz, defended by two squadrons of the 1st Regiment of Guides, were attacked by a strong detachment of infantry, which crossed the Gette at 10 a.m. Haelen, where there were two platoons of Carbineer Cyclists and a squadron of the 5th Lancers, was shelled from 7.30 a.m. At 9.15 a.m. the enemy's infantry reached the Gette and threw bridges over it, while at Diest two platoons of cyclists and the company of pioneers held their own for an hour and a half against a brigade of all arms. The Belgian Cavalry Division was then forced to retire north of Winghe St. Georges, to which place the 2nd Army Division had been sent to prolong the left of the army.

Further to the south, a German corps was advancing against the 1st Army Division. After driving in the Belgian outposts, the enemy occupied Tirlemont and attacked the positions of Hautem St. Marguerite, both in front and in flank. The 2nd Brigade offered a stubborn resistance till late in the evening, and enabled the rest of the division to disengage itself, but suffered heavily in this severe engagement.

By this time the presence of masses of the enemy's infantry on the Belgian left flank and front, the violence of their attacks, the new information received in

the course of the day—especially with regard to the constant crossing from the south to the north bank of the Meuse by fresh masses of infantry, by the bridges at Huy, Ampsin and Flône—all combined to remove any possible doubt from the Headquarters' Staff as to the imminent approach of vastly superior hostile forces advancing against the front and flanks of the army. The enveloping movement commenced towards Diest and Aerschot proved, moreover, that the army was threatened with having its left flank turned, and with being cut off from the Antwerp base.

As it turned out, the events which occurred in rapid succession on the following days were to confirm these views. There were actually, about the 18th, to the north of the Meuse :

Firstly, the II<sup>nd</sup>, IV<sup>th</sup> and IX<sup>th</sup> Corps, which were making for the left wing of the Belgian army between Diest and Tirlemont; they were supported on the flank by the 2<sup>nd</sup> German Cavalry Division, which was advancing between the Grande Nèthe and the Démer.

Secondly, the III<sup>rd</sup>, VII<sup>th</sup> and X<sup>th</sup> Corps, which, after passing between Liège and Huy from the south to the north bank of the Meuse, were marching towards the front Jodoigne-Namur; these were preceded by the 4<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Divisions, which were moving on Wavre and Gembloux.

Lastly, the six first-line corps were followed by five reserve corps.

Thus, without counting those German forces which were moving towards France across the Belgian provinces of Luxembourg and Namur, there were at that moment about 500,000 men advancing on the left bank of the Meuse.

Now what was the situation of the French and British armies in Belgium, on the afternoon of the 18th August, at the moment when the Belgian army thus found itself in actual contact with immensely superior German forces?

According to information furnished by the French General Staff, the 5th French army had (see Plate No. 3, p. 27) one corps holding the bridges on the Meuse from Hastière to the fortified position of Namur, and the bridges over the Sambre from Floreffe to Tamines; the three other corps forming this army were to arrive on the 19th in the region of Philippeville. It was threatened by a hostile group reported to be four army corps strong, stretching from Yvoir to Beauraing, and which had attacked Dinant on the evening of the 17th.

The British army was at that moment detraining south of the Sambre about Maubeuge; only its Cavalry Division had actually detrained; the army was to be ready to move, possibly on the 22nd, certainly on the 23rd.

Thus the Belgian army, about two army corps strong, remained alone in actual contact with eleven of the German army corps, belonging to the first and second armies, so that joint action in line with the French and British armies was impossible of realisation on the position taken up.

It was necessary to come to an immediate decision.

If the Belgian army remained stationary it would have, at daybreak on the 19th, to fight a battle the disastrous result of which was not for a moment in doubt; attacked in front and on both flanks by greatly superior forces, what was left of it would be cut off from Antwerp where, *vide* p. 18, all its supplies and munitions had been collected.

The Belgian army had maintained itself in its position of observation from the 5th to the 18th August, that is during thirteen days. It had resisted the attacks of the enemy's cavalry and light troops, and had forced him to carry out the concentration of his right in the frontier region, and to lose valuable time in deploying his main body in a wide enveloping movement. When the latter was on the point of taking effect, the only course open to the Belgian army was to retreat, so as to avoid destruction.

On the 18th August, in the afternoon, the King decided on the retreat of the army towards the north-west.

At 7.30 p.m. orders were issued that at dawn the army was to proceed to the left bank of the Dyle, and to halt on the front Neeryssche-Louvain-Rotselaer. At daybreak a sharp rearguard action commenced between the II<sup>nd</sup> German Army Corps and the brigade of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division stationed near Aerschot. It then became evident that the enemy's right outflanked the Belgian left, and that the front previously decided on had become untenable. The retirement on to the line of forts of the Antwerp position was then carried out as rapidly as possible.

On the 20th the army reached the entrenched camp of Antwerp without having been seriously molested. It was ready to play a further part in the operations agreed on with the armies of the Guaranteeing Powers by detaining in its front forces at least equal in numbers to its own.

The enemy, closely following up the Belgian army, entered Louvain on the 19th, and Brussels on the 20th. It was not till the 24th August, however, that the French frontier was crossed, or in other words, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the French mobilisation. Such was the result of the operations of the Belgian army in this first phase of the campaign.

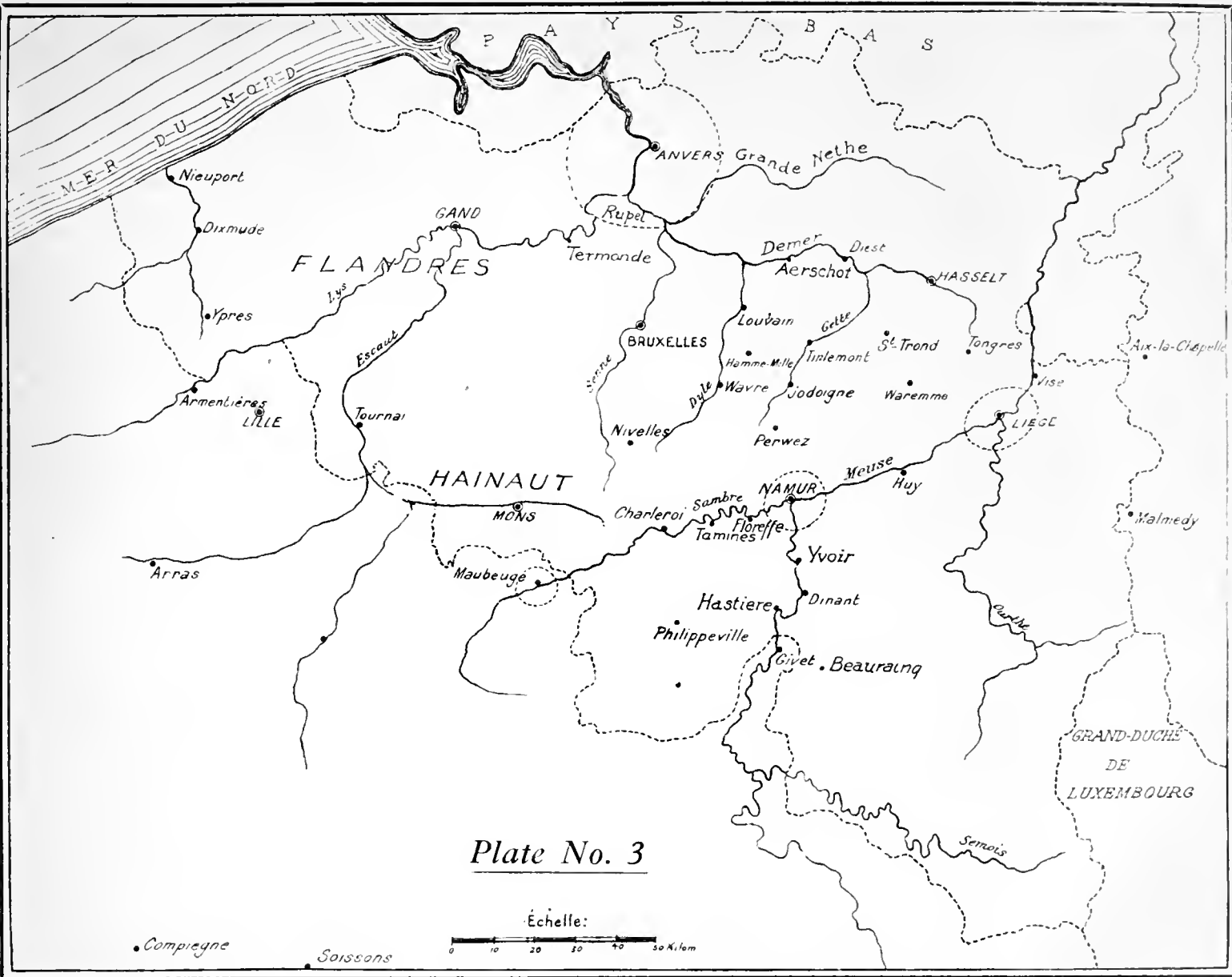


## *Plate No. 3*

SELECTION OF A POSITION ON THE GETTE.





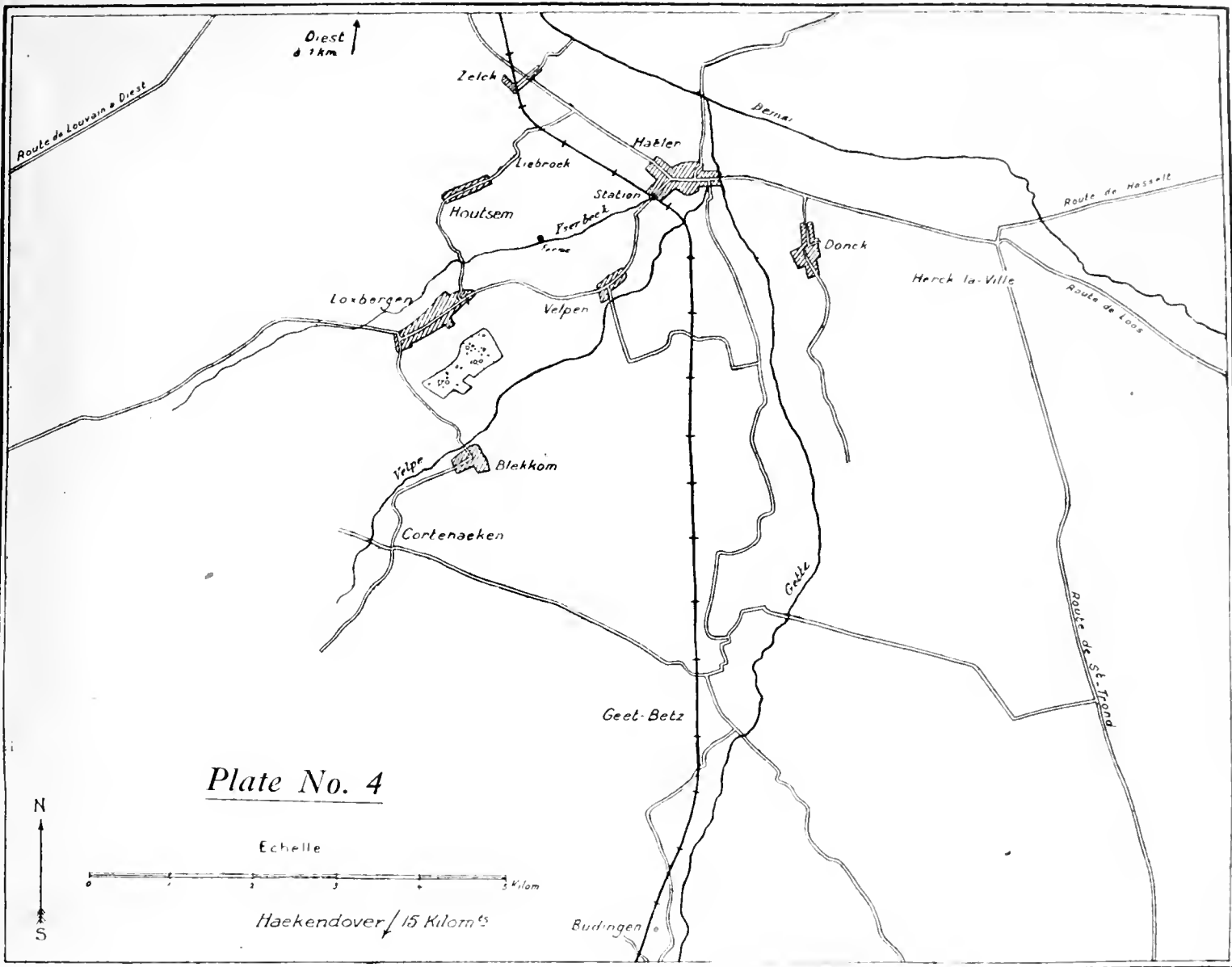




*Plate No. 4*

FIGHT AT HAELEN.





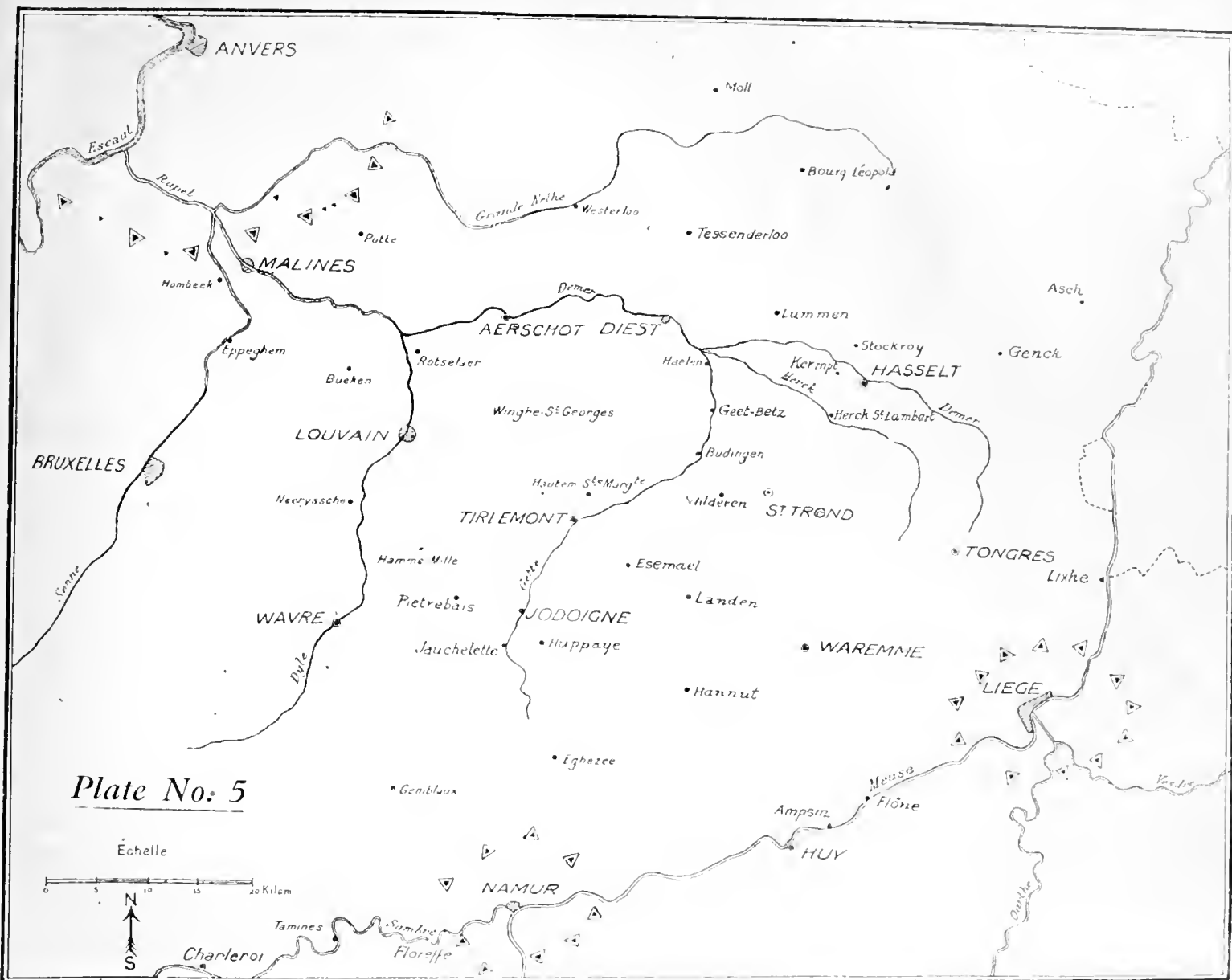


*Plate No. 5*

RETIREMENT OF THE ARMY ON ANTWERP.









## IV.

### THE DEFENCE OF NAMUR.

We have seen (p. 17) that after the loss of the line of the Meuse near Liège, the first natural line of defence which the Belgian army could occupy was formed by the Gette, prolonged by the course of the Meuse between Namur and Givet.

Now Namur with its nine forts constituted one of the strong points of this line. Moreover, Belgium had undertaken to provide for the defence of her fortified places (see p. 7). For these two reasons the 4th Division had been allotted to the defence of the fortified position of Namur.

As early as the 5th August in Condroz, and the 7th in Hesbaye, German cavalry patrols came into collision with the Belgian cavalry. The most serious engagement took place on the 13th at Boneffe, when a German detachment, consisting of 300 sabres, 400 cyclists and some machine guns, had established itself to the north of that village, and was surprised and dispersed by two Belgian squadrons and two cyclist companies. On the 15th a German detachment attempted to force a crossing of the Meuse at Dinant, but a French force which was defending the valley repulsed the attack.

At this moment the 8th Brigade was moved up towards Namur, from Huy, which it was occupying, as it ran the risk of being cut off by the German masses

**5th/20th  
August:  
First  
contacts.**

PLATE NO. 6.  
[P. 37.]

which were advancing westwards on both banks of the Meuse. Before moving it had destroyed the crossings of the river.

On the 19th the 8th Brigade retired from Andenne on to the fortified position, after having destroyed the bridges and blocked the tunnel of Seilles.

From that day enemy troops of all arms were reported within the zone of the fortress, in the direction of Faulx, as well as in that of Ramillies-Offus, where several regiments of German infantry and artillery were concentrated. Guns of very large calibre accompanied them.

Early on the 20th, the enemy began to drive in the main guards of the north-eastern sector of the fortress.

In front of Forts Maizeret, Andoy, and Dave, German batteries were located and shelled. During the night three attacks were attempted by the enemy's infantry in the intervals of the fort of Marchevelette.

**21st/23rd  
August:  
Defence of  
the forts and  
intervals.**

The bombardment of Namur commenced on the 21st August, at 10 a.m. It took place simultaneously against Forts Andoy, Maizeret, Marchevelette, and Cognelée, as well as against the intervals and the ground in rear; from the first it was of an extremely violent character. Howitzers and mortars fired on the forts, while the heavy artillery of the army troops took as its objective the trenches and the supporting points of the intervals; some guns opened fire on the town itself, and bombarded it during four hours.

Towards evening Fort Maizeret had received a great many shells, but its cupolas were still in working order. At Fort Andoy the damage was very serious;

several cupolas were jammed by fragments of concrete, and the magazines had been partly destroyed. Fort Marchovelette had also suffered considerably; only one cupola of 12 centimètre guns and two of 5.7 centimètres remained serviceable. Fort Cognelée, on the other hand, had received only slight damage. But in the three first-named forts the telephonic apparatus had been rendered unserviceable.

The bombardment continued during the night.

On the 22nd August, in the course of the morning, the garrison pushed out reconnaissances towards the besieging lines. They were everywhere met by heavy rifle and machine gun fire. The bombardment was as severe as on the previous day, and was extended to include Fort Dave. Towards 10 a.m. the garrison was reinforced by three French battalions (two of the 45th and one of the 148th Regiment), which were utilised in an attempted attack on enemy artillery reported near Wartet. The field artillery which was to support the attack was compelled to cease fire and the troops had to be withdrawn.

Meanwhile the town had again been shelled.

By evening Fort Dave had only been slightly damaged. Forts Andoy and Cognelée continued to fire. Fort Maizeret had been completely destroyed and was evacuated. Fort Marchovelette had been the object of systematic destruction, and its last cupola had been rendered unserviceable.

The bombardment continued all through the night.

At dawn on the 23rd August the fire of the heavy artillery increased against Fort Cognelée; an infantry attack was repulsed, but towards noon the fort was in the enemy's hands. By this time the main structure of Fort Marchovelette was

full of cracks, and the fire of the German heavy pieces was directed against Forts Emines and Suarlée.

All along the portion of the front attacked, both the permanent works and the field works in the intervals had been damaged. From Cognelée to Andoy only the field batteries were able still to reply to the fire of the assailants, and soon they too were reduced to silence.

The troops of the north-east and south-east sectors then withdrew towards Namur.

**23rd August:  
Retreat of  
the Namur  
Division  
towards  
France.**

By this time the situation of the 4th Division had become untenable. As the enemy had advanced in force north of the Meuse, and had forced the passages over the Sambre between Charleroi and Namur, as well as those over the Meuse towards Dinant, the retreat of the division was cut off in every direction, except between the Sambre and Meuse.

It was decided on the 23rd that the retirement should take place on that side. At about midnight the Belgian column bivouacked between Bioul and Arbre, threatened by the enemy in rear, and especially on the flank; it succeeded, however, in extricating itself, except the rear-guard, which was surrounded at Ermeton-sur-Biert; 12,000 men thus reached Mariembourg and France. They arrived at Antwerp about ten days later.

In spite of the difficulties of the retreat, and of the return to Antwerp, the evacuation of the division had been effected with a minimum of loss, and the army was once more complete in all its units, in the entrenched camp of Antwerp.

Fort Suarlée fell on the 25th August, after sustaining a severe bombardment.

*Plate No. 6*

DEFENCE OF NAMUR.





# Hesbaye

• Gembloux

• Perwez

• Ramillies-Offus

• Boneffe

Ft de Cognelée

Ft d'Emines

Ft de Marchovelette

Ft de Suarlée

NAMUR

Ft de Maizeret

Ft de Malonne

Ft d'Andoy

Ft de Dave

Ft de St Héribert

Fosses

Faulx

CHARLEROI

Entre Sambre et Meuse.

Arbre

Bloul

C o n d r o z

Mareilange

Ennemon-sur-Bert

Ciney

Dinant

Plate No. 6



Echelle

0 2 4 6 8 Kilom

25 Kilomètres  
Marembourg



## V.

### OPERATIONS IN COMBINATION WITH THE ARMIES OF THE GUARANTEEING POWERS, 20th AUGUST TO 27th SEPTEMBER.

From August 20th (see page 25 and Plate No. 3, p. 27), the Belgian Army was on the Rupel and the Nèthe, with a detachment at Termonde, and was close to its Antwerp base and to the line of forts defending that place.

**General  
Nature  
of the  
Operations  
during this  
period.**

In this position it in the first place saved from invasion a considerable part of the province of Antwerp, and of Flanders.

But the Belgian Army was, in addition, in a position to subordinate all its undertakings to the operations which were to be carried out in combination with the French and British forces. Its function was to be to attract and to keep in front of it the greatest possible number of the enemy forces. The opportunities for taking the offensive would be, on the one hand, when the Franco-British army was engaged in battles on a large scale, and when it would be of great importance to detain German forces, and on the other hand, when the proportion of the Belgian to the German strength at any time enabled the offensive to be assumed under favourable circumstances.

Up to the 25th September the German forces opposed to the Belgian Army were not superior to the latter in numbers, and, generally speaking, there was

equilibrium of forces. When this equilibrium was upset in favour of the Belgian Army, the Army Command decided to take the offensive, to oblige the enemy to obtain reinforcements, so as to re-establish the equilibrium. After the 25th September, the enemy was considerably reinforced and the situation was completely changed.

Besides these operations on a large scale, the Belgian operations undertaken in combination with those of the Franco-British forces aimed, on the one hand at the retention at all costs of a line of retreat for the army towards the west, so as to ensure an ultimate junction, and, on the other at the destruction of the lines of communication of the German army.

**25th/26th  
August :  
Sortie during  
the battles of  
the Sambre  
and of Mons.**

PLATE NO. 7.  
[P. 47.]

Commencing on the 21st August, the bulk of the German armies disappeared from the front of the Belgian army and turned towards the Sambre and Hainaut. Before Antwerp an army of observation was installed, consisting of the IIIrd and IXth Reserve Corps, whilst the 13th Reserve Division and one or two Landwehr divisions established themselves about Liège. These corps had just arrived at the moment when the Belgian Headquarters, on the 24th August, learnt that the opposing forces on the Sambre and at Mons were engaged in violent battles. The bulk of the enemy's forces appeared to be sufficiently distant for their intervention to be out of the question. Circumstances were very favourable for making a sortie from the entrenched camp before the German army of observation had time to fortify its positions strongly. The sortie took place on the 25th and 26th August.

The sector selected for the operation was chosen with a view to threatening the German communications and to piercing the lines of the IIIrd and IXth Reserve

Corps, which seemed to extend on a very wide front, from Wolverthem by Elewyt to Aerschot and even Diest.

The following dispositions were made for the sortie :

The 6th Division was to make the central attack on Hofstade and Elewyt ; the 1st and 5th Divisions were to operate on its right between the canal of Willebroeck and the Senne ; the 2nd Division was to come into action on its left, towards Boortmeerbeek ; the 3rd Division was to be in reserve in rear of the 6th, while the Cavalry Division was also to be in reserve, near Putte.

The attack encountered defensive dispositions on the part of the enemy, which had already been strongly organised. The 6th Division gained possession of Hofstade and of the Schiplaeken woods, the 1st and 5th Divisions took Sempst, Weerde and Eppeghem, but on the left wing the 2nd Division was unable to debouch on the west bank of the Louvain canal, and was even forced to retire. In the centre the 6th Division failed to capture Elewyt.

The battles of the Sambre and of Mons being over, the operation could not be continued with advantage, and the army returned to the entrenched camp.

On the 4th September, German troops marched on Termonde, drove back the detachment which was guarding that town, crossed the Scheldt, and threatened the line of retreat towards the west. The 1st and 6th Divisions were ordered to cross to the left bank of the river in order to keep open the Belgian communications in that direction. The enemy withdrew to the right bank and Termonde was reoccupied. After this, the enemy was always checked in his attempts to cross the river, and the line of retreat to the west was always kept open.

**4th/9th  
September :  
Operations  
undertaken  
to preserve  
the line of  
retreat  
westwards.**

**9th/13th  
September :  
Sortie after  
the battle of  
the Marne.**

On the 7th and 8th September the Belgian Headquarters learnt that the German forces in front of Antwerp had been reduced. Three divisions of the army of observation were on the march to France in order to reinforce the troops retreating from the Marne onto the Aisne. These units had been replaced by a division of marines and by the 26th and 37th Landwehr Brigades.

The Army Command considered the moment favourable for the execution, by the whole of the field army, of a sortie intended either to oblige the enemy to recall towards Antwerp some of the forces despatched to France, or, should he not do this, to inflict a defeat on the inferior German forces in front of Antwerp.

The sortie began on the 9th September. The German position, very strongly entrenched, had its right extended as far as Over de Vaart. It was necessary to avoid a frontal attack on these strong fieldworks, while the Antwerp position had to remain covered. The operation was conducted with a view to turning the German right. The 3rd Division was directed against the end of the position at Over de Vaart, while the 6th moving on Thildonck, and the 2nd on Wygmael and Louvain, were to outflank it. The Cavalry Division, forming the extreme left, was to debouch on the left bank of the Dyle. In front the 1st Division was to attack Hofstade and Elewyt, while the 5th Division was to operate on its right, west of the Senne. A detachment of all arms guarding Termonde was to safeguard the communications.

The sortie began successfully; on the 9th the crossings over the Démer and over the Dyle were captured; Aerschot was taken.

On the 10th, the offensive was continued, the Belgian left wing advancing towards Louvain, a troop of the 4th Regiment of Chasseurs-à-cheval even entered

the town, but the 2nd Division was checked before Wygmael and Putkapel. The enemy then recalled the 6th Reserve Infantry Division which was on its way to France, to meet this attack.

On the 11th, the 3rd Division succeeded in an attack on Over de Vaart, the enemy being driven back, and the 6th Division got as far as the Malines-Louvain railway line.

On the 12th, the 6th German Division, which had been brought back, came into action near Wespelaer, and the enemy now took the offensive, driving back the 2nd Belgian Division to Rotselaer and Wesemael. This retreat of the left wing necessitated the withdrawal of the 6th Division and later on that of the 3rd Division.

On the 13th, the whole army retired to the entrenched camp.

The principal object was attained. The operation had obliged the enemy not only to definitely recall the 6th Division of the IIIrd Reserve Corps on to the Belgian front, but also, as was learnt soon afterwards, it had delayed for two days the IXth Reserve Corps on its march southwards, just at a moment when the German armies, retreating from the Marne, stood in urgent need of reinforcements. The sortie, moreover, had seriously alarmed the enemy even in Brussels itself.

It was about this time that the first measures were taken by the Germans with a view to the siege of Antwerp, and that heavy artillery equipment and more numerous forces were brought up in front of that fortress.

After the 13th September equilibrium was once more established between the opposing forces; the German troops established before Antwerp were not again

reduced in strength. They completed their defences on a position extending by Haecht, Elewytt and Wolverthem, and prolonged towards the south as far as Grand-Bigard.

**22nd  
September :  
Destruction  
of railway  
lines.**

The railway system of the country provided the enemy with great facilities for supplying and transporting his troops. The Belgian Army Command wished to interfere with this, and accordingly ordered the formation of seven detachments each consisting of 100 cyclist volunteers, intended to carry out demolitions of the railway lines in the region occupied by the enemy.

On the 22nd September these parties left Antwerp, each having a special zone of operations assigned to it. The greater part succeeded in getting through the German lines and in reaching the selected points, where they cut the principal railway lines of Limbourg, Brabant and Hainaut, causing considerable disturbance to the enemy's transport.

Most of these detachments were able to rejoin the army, but some came in contact with the German troops, and were surrounded or surprised.

**25th/27th  
September :  
Advance  
undertaken  
towards the  
end of the  
Battle of the  
Aisne.**

On the 25th September the French Headquarters Staff notified that, as a violent engagement was in progress on the left of the Franco-British front, the moment was opportune for the Belgian Army to attack the German lines of communications.

In the course of the movements preparatory to the attack, it was ascertained that the strength of the German forces before Antwerp had been increased, and that the enemy was making his dispositions for a siege of that place.



The more ambitious operation which had been agreed on in consultation with the French Commander had therefore to be reduced to a threatening movement of the main body of the army towards the south-west. An actual attack was not ordered. Nevertheless, in the course of this operation, advantage was taken by the Commander-in-Chief of a favourable opportunity presenting itself to attack an isolated detachment of the enemy.

The 37th Landwehr Brigade was engaged in front of Termonde, and orders were issued for the 4th Belgian Division to make a frontal attack on it from that place, while the 5th Division was to attack its right flank, and the Cavalry Division, which had been moved from Ghent towards Alost, was to make a flank attack on its left. The 4th Division, advancing on both banks of the Dendre, found itself violently engaged; the 5th Division, fearing an attack on its left flank, only sent weak detachments against the enemy, so that the latter was able to extricate his troops under cover of the darkness.



*Plate No. 7*

SORTIES FROM ANTWERP.



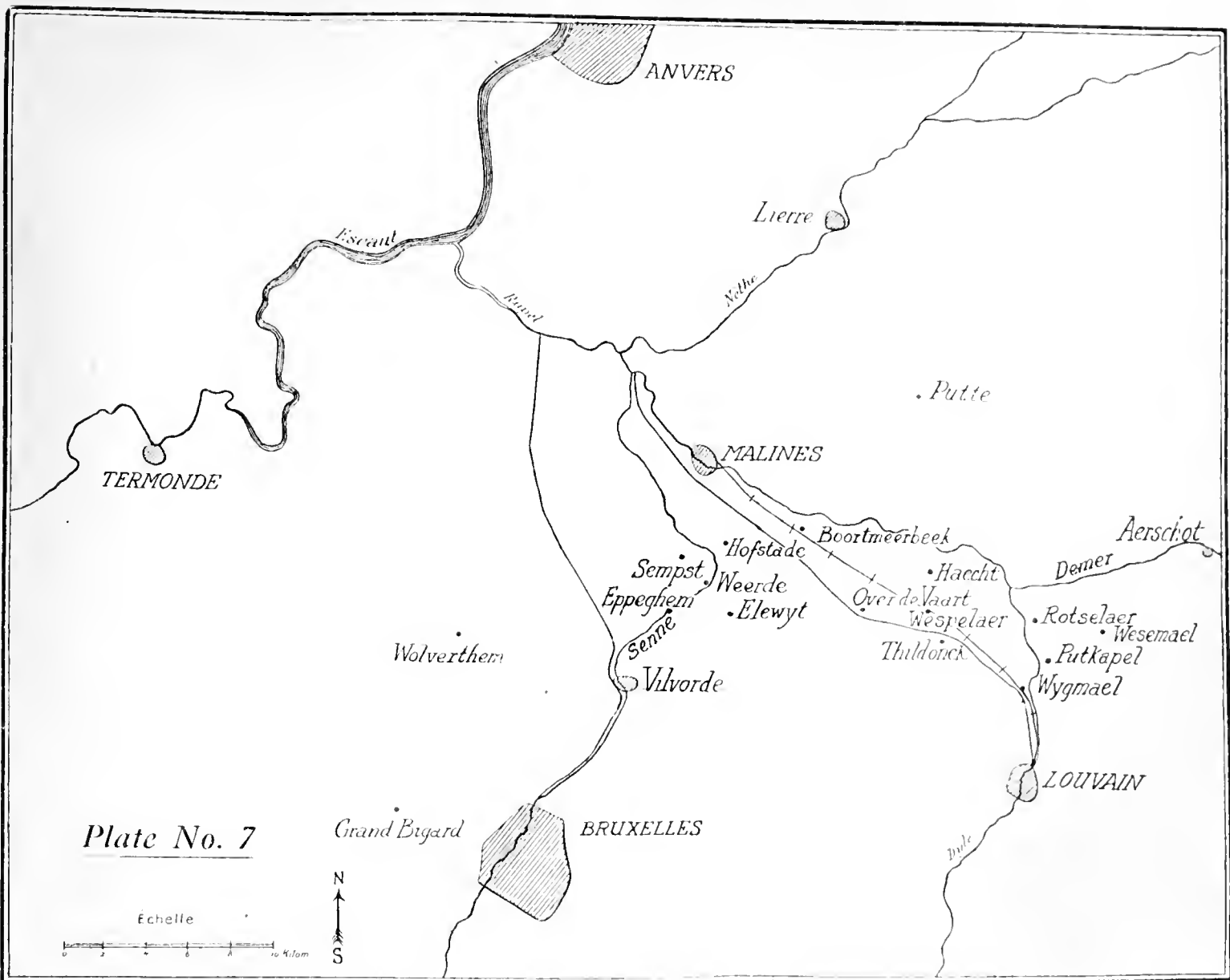


Plate No. 7

Echelle

0 2 4 6 8 10 Kilom

N  
S



## VI.

### DEFENCE OF ANTWERP.

At the end of September the enemy had received reinforcements in troops of all arms, and especially in siege artillery and pioneers. The besieging army consisted of: the IIIrd Reserve Army Corps, the 26th and 37th Brigades of Landwehr, a division of marines, the 4th Ersatz Division, the 1st Ersatz Reserve Division, a Bavarian Division (probably), a brigade of foot artillery and a brigade of siege pioneers.

**28th/29th  
September :  
First effects  
of the  
German  
heavy  
artillery.**

The siege operations began on the 28th September, at which moment the main body of the army was located in the 4th sector. In order to oppose a possible attack on the 3rd sector, the 3rd, 2nd and 6th Divisions had each left there a detachment consisting of a regiment of infantry, a regiment of cavalry, a cyclist company, and a group of batteries. The 2nd Division had been placed so as to form a reserve for the 3rd and 4th sectors.

PLATE NO. 8.  
[P. 57.]

The enemy drove back the detachment of the 1st Division, which, posted in the south, was holding the outskirts of Malines. He bombarded Forts Waelhem and Wavre St. Catherine with heavy artillery. The resistance of the latter was soon seriously reduced by the fire of the 42 centimetre howitzers.

The 1st and 2nd Divisions were then hurriedly ordered into the 3rd sector (Waelhem-Lierre); the 3rd and 6th Divisions remained in the 4th sector (Waelhem

to the Scheldt); the 4th Division was at Termonde, and the 5th constituted the general reserve.

On the 29th September the enemy attacked the 4th sector and drove back the advanced troops of the 3rd and 6th Divisions. The bombardment of the 3rd sector was continued, and obliged the Belgian outposts to retire on to the line of the forts. Soon all the works on the left bank of the Nèthe were being shelled. Forts Wavre St. Catherine and Waelhem suffered the most on that day; an ammunition store exploded in the former fort, and the successive destruction of the casemates forced the garrison to evacuate the work at 6 p.m.

**The problem  
of national  
defence as it  
presented  
itself at that  
moment.  
Preparation  
of positions  
for ultimate  
occupation.**

The effect of the German heavy artillery, as experienced already at Liège, at Namur, at Maubeuge, and, on the 29th September, at Forts Wavre St. Catherine and Waelhem, left no possible doubt as to the fate in store for the Antwerp fortifications. Contrary to what had previously been universally believed, the entrenched camp could not long afford a safe refuge for the field troops.

Hence from that day Army Headquarters had to keep in view the moment when the army would be compelled to abandon the fortress in order to avoid having, at no distant date, to lay down their arms.

PLATE No. 9.  
[P. 67.]

The first thing to do, with a view to preparing for the retreat of the army, was to transfer the base to the west, and Ostend was selected as the most suitable place.

Arrangements were accordingly made at once for the removal to the new base of the wounded, the prisoners, stores of every kind (munitions, provisions, medical



equipment, etc.), the depôts of the various units, the recruits of the new levy, the untrained volunteers, the manufacturing establishments, etc., etc. When the base was cleared out of Antwerp the army would regain its freedom of action, and would continue to live its own life, in Antwerp or outside, and it would be able to evacuate the fortress the moment its investment became imminent.

From Antwerp to Ostend the only line of railway then available started from the left bank of the river and passed through St. Nicolas and Ghent. Now the city was on the right bank and was not connected with the left bank by rail.

The first railway bridge up stream was at Tamise, and in order to reach it the bridge of Willebroeck, which was exposed to the fire of the enemy's guns, had to be passed. Precautions were taken so successfully that trains were able to pass every night, with lights extinct, from the 29th September to the 7th October, without attracting the enemy's attention and without being molested.

Thus the movement was prepared for ; but to enable it to be carried out later on, it was necessary to make the lines of retreat secure. At the same time the Antwerp position had to be held up to the last possible moment, since by doing so the invasion of the country would be impeded, and a junction with the French and British forces would be rendered possible, it was hoped, in time to enable the latter to prolong the Belgian line southwards, along the Dendre.

The situation was similar, it will be seen, to that in which the army had found itself when it was in position on the Gette (p. 17); there also it had to hold on as long as possible with a view to a junction with the Franco-British forces, and there also it had in the end to retreat owing to the junction not having been effected up to the moment when the danger became imminent.

In view of the above, the Belgian forces were disposed as follows: the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 6th Divisions were posted in front of the Rupel and of the Nèthe, to defend the line of the threatened forts; the 4th Division, by holding the line of the Scheldt at Baesrode, Termonde and Schoonaerde, covered the lines of retreat towards the west; the Cavalry Division, with Headquarters at Wetteren, observed all the left bank of the Dendre, and co-operated with the 4th Division.

So long as the Dendre was not crossed by the enemy the position of the army was not compromised, and even after crossing the Dendre he would run up against the 4th Division and the Cavalry Division on the Scheldt.

30th  
September  
to 6th  
October :  
Defence of  
the forts and  
of the  
intervals.

On the 30th September, two very severe attacks were made against the bridge-head of Blaesveld, which was defended by the 3rd Division. They were driven back with heavy loss. The 6th Division similarly repulsed an attack made on its outposts. The permanent works of the 4th sector were shelled without success.

In the 3rd sector, the situation soon became very grave owing to a heavy bombardment of the whole front. The forts were shelled uninterruptedly for five hours, and the intervals between them were also heavily bombarded. The troops of the 1st Division gave way before this fire, which destroyed all the works, shelter-trenches and refuges.

At Fort Lierre, the explosion of a shell projected the cupola of a 5·7 centimètre gun out of its pit. At Fort Koningshoyckt most of the guns were out of action and part of the work was destroyed. The redoubts of Dorpveld and Boschbeek were full of cracks; the concrete masses when struck by the projectiles seemed

to be forced into the ground; the shock was so great that the gun detachments could only with difficulty keep on their feet in the cupolas.

At nightfall the enemy ceased fire.

No infantry whatever had as yet shown itself.

On the 1st October, from 2 to 4 a.m., all the artillery of the defence which **1st October.** was still capable of action proceeded to shell all the enemy's batteries within their field of fire. The enemy bombarded Fort Breendonck, but without much effect. The bombardment of the 3rd sector was resumed towards 8 a.m. and was extended to the works and intervals of Fort Kessel.

Under cover of this bombardment and of a continuous curtain of shell-fire, the infantry then made an attack, and succeeded in occupying the defensive works to the west of the village of Wavre St. Catherine. The 1st Division, in trying to re-occupy its trenches, met with a resistance which it was unable to overcome. The 2nd Division, on the left of the 1st, was shaken by the fire of the enemy's guns and driven back on to the Nèthe.

Fort Koningshoyckt still held out, but the Boschbeek redoubt had to be evacuated, while that of Dorpveld was stormed by the enemy.

During this time the 1st Brigade (5th Division), which had been sent to Lierre on the 30th to reinforce the 1st Fortress Regiment of Carbineers, succeeded in holding its ground there.

The Military Governor then ordered the occupation of the supporting position prepared between Fort Koningshoyckt and the Duffel redoubt.

During the night the enemy attempted to pierce the interval between the Tallaert redoubt and Fort Lierre, but again met with a check.

**2nd October.**

In the course of the 2nd October, the 1st and 2nd Divisions counter-attacked in order to retake the positions lost on the line of forts. On the left bank of the Nèthe, Fort Duffel alone still held out.

The garrison of the Dorpveld redoubt had been shut up in its shelters since 5 a.m. on the previous day, the enemy having occupied the main structure and blocked the ventilation holes and having commenced to mine the casemates. The commander and the last of the defenders were still at their posts when a mine completed the destruction of the work.

Fort Koningshoyckt had been surrounded by the enemy's riflemen since the attack made on the 1st October; the machinery vault, the machine-gun casemates and the front face of the gorge had all collapsed. At noon a magazine blew up; at 2.30 p.m. an explosion rendered the fort untenable.

The Tallaert redoubt had also been destroyed.

Fort Lierre had been subjected to a methodical destruction by a bombardment which was continued during several hours. At about noon only the entrance postern remained intact; the cupolas were destroyed or inaccessible; most of the passages were blocked; the garrison left the fort at 6 p.m.

The Military Governor then decided to withdraw the line of resistance across the Nèthe, the south bank of which was flooded.

**3rd October.**

On the 3rd October, from 6 a.m., the fire of the German heavy batteries was

directed on Fort Kessel, on the north bank of the Nèthe, and also on the approaches leading to it from the rear.

From this moment the only artillery of which the defence was able to dispose consisted of field artillery (7·5 centimètre guns and 15 centimètre howitzers) and of two armoured trains carrying 12 centimètre guns.

The Duffel redoubt, having exhausted its ammunition, fell on that day.

Fort Kessel was shelled by batteries of large calibre; its front face and gorge were enfiladed. The caponnière was struck and blocked by some of the first shells; a casemate fell in; at 7 a.m. the fire-commander's station was destroyed; the right-hand flanking battery was out of action; the cupola containing the 15 centimètre guns, and two cupolas for 5·7 centimètre guns were jammed. At 8.30 a.m. the right half of the fort was in ruins. It was abandoned in the course of the day.

On the previous evening, a brigade of British Marine Light Infantry, 2,200 strong, had arrived at Antwerp. On the 4th it relieved the 1st mixed Brigade before Lierre. **4th October.**

On the same day the bombardment was extended to the whole north bank of the Nèthe, and the enemy forced the troops defending the ground lying between the Great and the Little Nèthe to retire.

At the same time German troops crossed the Dendre, and attempted to cross the Scheldt at Schoonaerde and at Termonde.

On the 5th, the enemy occupied Lierre, but was unable to debouch from it; he also succeeded in effecting a crossing further down stream. **5th October.**

In addition, fresh attacks were made on the troops guarding the lines of retreat, notably towards Schoonaerde; they were everywhere repulsed, but the position of the 4th Division began to be critical.

**6th October.**

On the 6th October, the besieging force made a general attack on the position which had been placed in a state of defence on the north bank of the Nèthe.

The line formed by the 1st, 2nd and 5th Divisions, reinforced by the reserves of the 3rd and 6th Divisions and by the brigade of British marines, gave way under the violent German artillery fire.

Several counter-attacks were attempted, of which some got as far as the river bank of the Nèthe, but did not succeed in arresting the enemy's advance.

On this day several attempts were made to force the passage of the Scheldt at Baesrode, Termonde and Schoonaerde, but were stopped by the 4th Division and the Cavalry Division. But, as the Commander of the 4th Division reported that the situation was becoming more and more serious, and as it was indispensable to secure communication with the west, the 6th Division was ordered, at about 10 a.m., to cross the Scheldt at Tamise and to go to the support of the 4th.

Altogether, at this moment, the enemy having forced the line of the Nèthe, and having crossed the Dendre, the situation of the army was completely changed. Events affecting it had also taken place elsewhere, as will be seen.

*Plate No. 8*

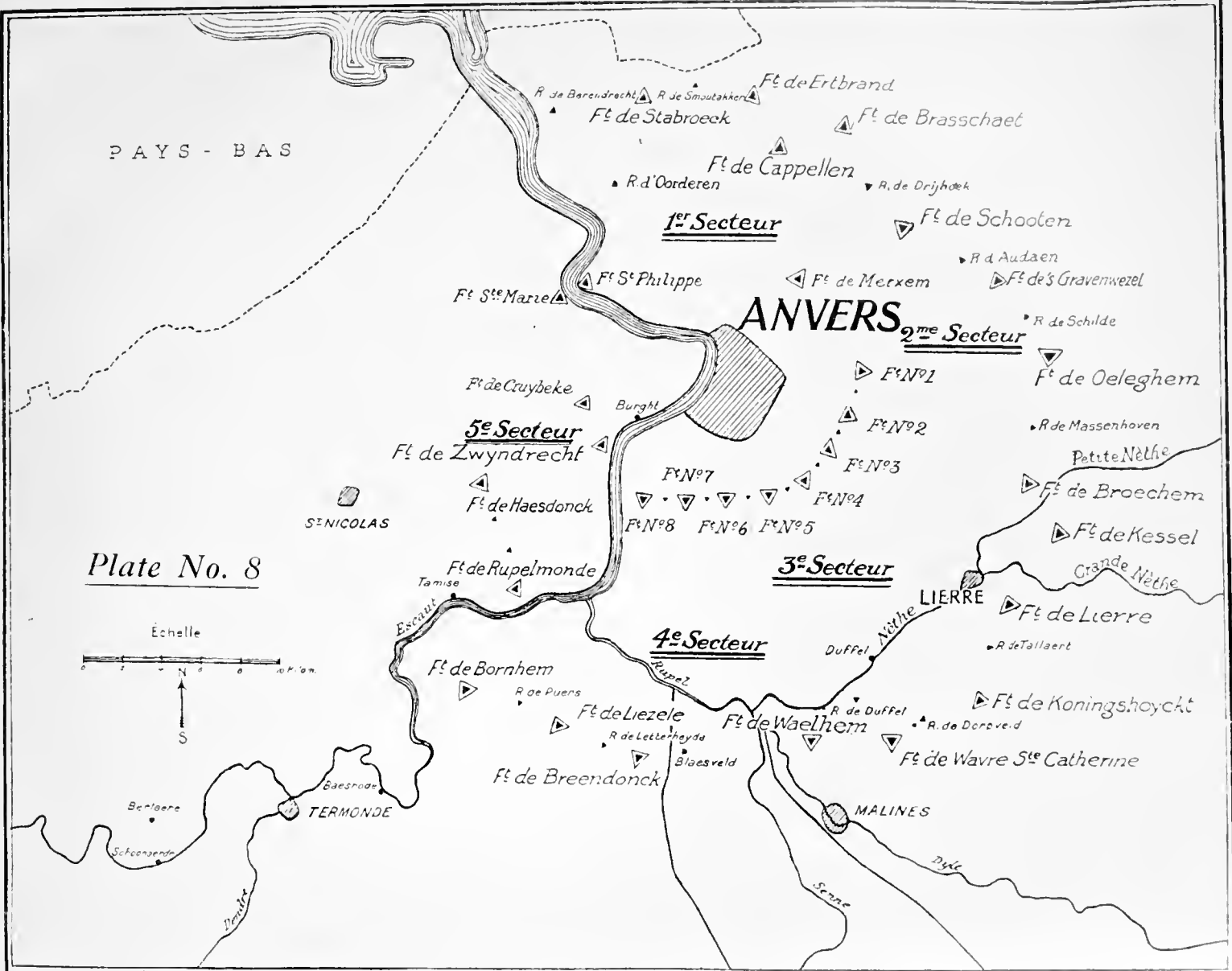
DEFENCE OF ANTWERP.





PAYS - BAS

Plate No. 8





## VII.

### OPERATIONS IN COMBINATION WITH THE ARMIES OF THE GUARANTEEING POWERS, 6th TO 15th OCTOBER.

Up to the beginning of October, the chief danger which the Belgian army had to face was that of being surrounded by the German forces which were before Antwerp.

A new danger was about to threaten it.

The retreat from the Marne had, by the 13th September, brought the mass of the German armies on to the line of the Aisne, with its right about Lassigny. From that moment the opposing forces had constantly tried to turn each other's flank on the western wing. The German flank was thus successively prolonged from Lassigny towards the north, and had reached the neighbourhood of Lille by the beginning of October.

The effect of this was that the Belgian army would be in danger of being cut off from the Franco-British armies if the German front were prolonged still further towards the north, the distance from Lille to the sea at Nieuport being only 38 miles, whereas from the Nèthe to Nieuport is no less than 88 miles. Thus at the beginning of October the Belgian army found its retreat threatened not only by the besieging army, but also by the right wing of the German armies operating in France.

**New factors  
in the  
defence  
problem.**

PLATE No. 9.  
[P. 67.]

It therefore became necessary, if the army was to continue to hold Antwerp, that its line of retreat should be covered further to the west than before. Beyond Termonde, Schoonaerde and Wetteren, Ghent had to be occupied, owing to its being the junction of communications in that region and equidistant from Lille, where the German right wing already rested, and from the Nèthe, on which the Belgian army was still drawn up.

Under these circumstances, on the 4th October the Belgian Commander-in-Chief, convinced that Ghent must be held at all costs, and not having any troops available for the purpose, sent an urgent message to the British military authorities, who had shown themselves disposed to provide help for the defence of Antwerp, pointing out the necessity for the occupation of Ghent. The co-operation of the British 7th Division, which was landing on the Belgian coast, had been promised, and some French troops were also to take part in the movement.

On the evening of the 6th October the following was the situation :

The line of the Nèthe had been pierced, and the Dendre had been crossed by the enemy. The line of the Scheldt was being violently attacked by ever-increasing German forces, which threatened to cut off the Belgian army, so that all hopes of a junction under the guns of Antwerp with the main body of the Franco-British forces had vanished. The occupation of Ghent was provided for, and the last military trains conveying the base supplies from Antwerp towards Ostend were to leave on the night of the 6th/7th.

Retreat was still possible, but it was becoming urgent to execute it.

The King issued orders for the passage of the Field Army on to the left bank of the Scheldt during the night of the 6th/7th. It was to utilise the bridges

of Tamise, Hoboken and Burght, and was then to retreat westwards. The fortress of Antwerp was to continue to be defended by the garrisons of the forts, some regiments of Fortress Infantry, the 2nd Army Division and three British Naval Brigades, the two last of which had arrived at Antwerp on the 5th October.

The retreat began on the evening of the 6th, and by the morning of the 7th the whole force was on the left bank of the Scheldt. The King left Antwerp at 3 p.m. on the 7th to accompany the army in its movement, and spent the succeeding nights at St. Nicolas, Selzaete and Eecloo respectively.

It was high time.

On the same day the Scheldt was forced at Schoonaerde. The 6th Division, which had been sent in support to the left bank on the 6th October, was holding the enemy in check at Berlaere. In the Ghent neighbourhood a mixed detachment of the enemy was already reported at Cruyshautem, with advanced parties at Nazareth.

As the Franco-British forces had not yet arrived at Ghent, the 4th Brigade was at once transported there to oppose any attempts on that place which might be made by the enemy. Up to this time the protection of the roads and railways which converge on this point had been entrusted to bodies of the civic guard, a squadron of mounted gendarmerie and four battalions of volunteers.

On the 8th October the enemy advanced on Lokeren, where he came up against the 3rd Division. That evening the 1st Division was moved by rail from St. Nicolas to Ostend, while the other divisions marched towards the Terneuzen canal.

**6th/10th  
October:  
The army  
escapes  
investment.  
Capitulation  
of Antwerp.**

On the 9th, the 37th Landwehr Brigade was operating north of the Scheldt near Lokeren, and was followed by the 4th Ersatz Division, which had crossed the river at Schoonaerde. The 1st Ersatz Reserve Division and a Division of Bavarian Landwehr advanced on Ghent by Quatrecht, Gontrode and Lemberge, but meanwhile reinforcements had reached Ghent; a brigade of French Marine Fusiliers had taken up its quarters there on the previous evening, and a considerable portion of the British 7th Division arrived during the day. Ghent and its approaches from the east and south-east were occupied by 25,000 to 30,000 men.

Thus threatened on their left flank, the German forces which had crossed the Scheldt were unable to advance northwards to the Dutch frontier, and had to look on powerless to interfere while the Belgian army carried out its retreat without being seriously molested. On the 9th, at Melle, they came in contact with the French Marine Fusiliers supported by two groups of Belgian Artillery, and next day again, the front Melle-Meirelbeke was subjected to a violent attack, which, however, was repulsed by the French Marine Fusiliers.

While the retreat of the army was being successfully conducted, the attacks on the fortress of Antwerp had redoubled in intensity.

**7th October**

On the 7th October Fort Broechem having been destroyed, the enemy established himself north of the Nèthe, and began the attack of the second line of defence. Fort 1 was the first to be bombarded. In the 4th sector, Forts Liezele and Breendonck still kept the besiegers in check.

The bombardment of the city itself began at midnight.

**8th October**

The following was the disposition of the German forces before Antwerp, on

the 8th October : The IIIrd Reserve Corps, reinforced by the 26th Landwehr Brigade, occupied the ground opposite Forts 1 to 6 ; the Marine Infantry Brigade was in the rear of the left of the IIIrd Corps ; between the Dyle and the Scheldt were the Marine Artillery Brigade and the 4th Ersatz Division.

The bombardment of the supporting points of the second line was continued without a pause. In view of the situation the Governor decided at 5 p.m. that the 2nd Army Division and the British troops, except the Anglo-Belgian garrison of Fort No. 4, should be made to join the field army ; accordingly in the evening the above-mentioned troops began to cross the Scheldt by the Burght and Steen bridges. The crossing was completed at about 2 a.m.

During the day on the 9th, Fort Merxem capitulated, as well as the Dryhoek redoubt, and Forts Brasschaet and the Audaen redoubt were evacuated after their electric plant and their guns had been put out of action ; the garrison of Fort No. 4 left that work, crossed the Scheldt and destroyed the bridges.

**9th October**

By about 10 a.m. the Governor had retired to Fort Sainte Marie, and at about noon the bombardment of the city ceased.

The Military Governor capitulated on the 10th October.

**10th October**

The main body of the army, on the morning of the 9th October, was behind the canal from Ghent to Terneuzen, with rearguards east of that canal, towards Loochristy, Lokeren, Wachtebeke, and Moerbeke, which were left there in order to cover the retreat of the 2nd Division and of the British contingent, which had left Antwerp on the evening of the 8th October.

**10th/15th  
October :  
The army  
takes up a  
position on  
the Yser.**

Two lines of defence were available for the retreating army, one the Ghent-Terneuzen canal, prolonged by the Scheldt, the other the Schipdonck canal continued by the Lys. The intention was to resist on one or the other of these lines, and thus to save from invasion a considerable portion of Flanders, if a junction could be effected with the Franco-British forces.

But at that moment the French left wing was near Arras, and the British army was only beginning to detrain in the region of St. Omer. Under these circumstances, by stopping on the Ghent-Terneuzen canal, or on the Schipdonck canal, the Belgian army would have run the risk of having its right turned, and of being driven on to the Dutch frontier or into the sea by the very superior ↘ German forces which were already assembled in Belgium. These forces included the Antwerp siege army, now available, several divisions of which were already on the march westwards, as well as the XXIIInd, XXIIIrd, XXVIth, and XXVIIth Reserve Army Corps recently formed, which had just arrived in Belgium.

There was therefore no choice but to retire further, until a line should be reached which would allow of a junction with the Franco-British forces, and should at the same time constitute a strong defensive position.

The army accordingly retired as far as the Yser.

The line of the Yser presented considerable advantages. Looked upon from the point of view of its general relation to the Franco-British front, which at that moment extended from Lassigny towards Arras, it was in prolongation of that line and constituted an excellent defensive position, securing the junction with that front. As regards its own merits, the position was tactically a strong one, the left flank resting on the sea, the command of which was in friendly hands, the front being



covered by the river, and the right flank being protected by the river higher up, which from the old fort at Knoeke bends westwards by Elsendamme and Rousbrugge. The extent of the line, moreover, was not disproportionate to the strength of the army. Finally, and this was a considerable moral advantage, it offered to the army a last refuge on Belgian soil.

The King, judging that no other line offered as great advantages, decided to establish the army on the Yser, and to place this line in a state of defence.

We have seen (p. 62) how the forces which held Ghent had successfully barred the road to the attempts which were made to envelop the Belgian army. On the 11th October the latter had completed its movement, and the troops holding Ghent were at once ordered to retire. A fresh effort on the part of the enemy on that evening was arrested by the British 7th Division, which, in spite of it, succeeded in retiring under artillery and infantry fire.

The Belgian cavalry covered its retreat and kept in touch with the enemy's forces, fighting rearguard actions on the Ghent-Terneuzen canal, and on the Scheldt, as well as on the Schipdonck canal, and on the Lys. The 1st Cavalry Division then retired, fighting, by Lootenhulle, on to the right wing of the army. The 2nd Cavalry Division (which had recently been formed, mainly out of the divisional cavalry regiments) withdrew on Ursel, Bruges, and the front of the army.

By the 12th, the transport of the troops and of their convoys was secured, in spite of the danger of the situation and of the technical difficulties, the railways Selzaete-Eecloo-Bruges and Bruges-Thourout being single lines.

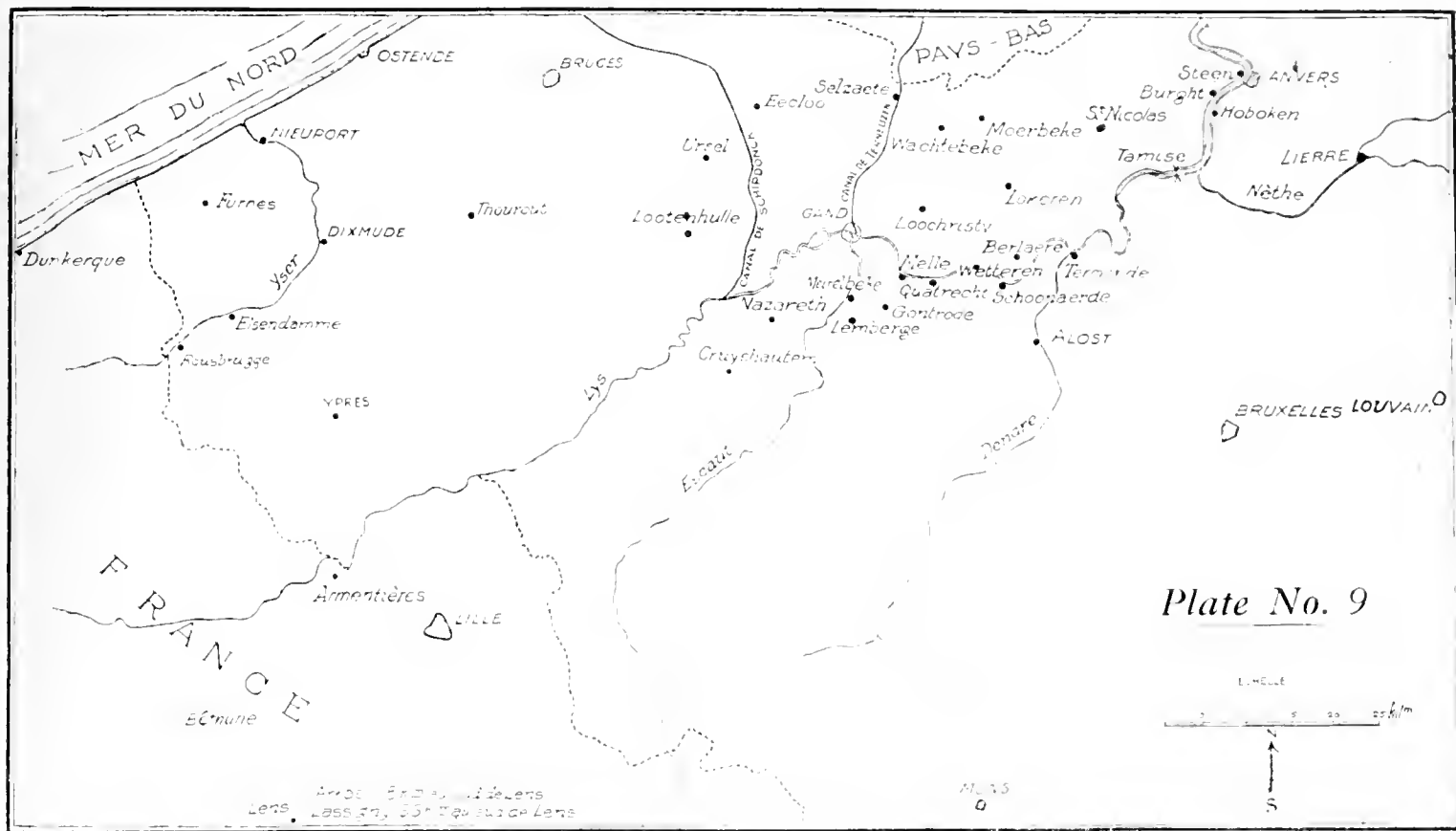
On the 15th October the Belgian army was on the Yser.



*Plate No. 9*

RETREAT OF THE ARMY FROM ANTWERP TO THE YSER







## VIII.

### JOINT OPERATIONS WITH THE ARMIES OF THE GUARANTEEING POWERS: THE BATTLE OF THE YSER.

At the moment when the Belgian Army, reduced as it was to 82,000 men, including 48,000 rifles, had arrived in the selected position on the Yser, the King addressed the following proclamation to the troops:

“Soldiers,

“For two months and more you have now been fighting in the most  
“just cause, for your hearths and homes, and for our national independence.

“You have held up the enemy’s forces, you have stood three sieges,  
“and made several sorties, and you have successfully carried out a long  
“retreat through a narrow passage.

“Hitherto you have fought alone in this gigantic struggle.

“You now find yourselves alongside the valiant armies of France and  
“England. It is now incumbent on you to uphold the reputation of our  
“arms by the tenacity and bravery of which you have already given so  
“many proofs. Our national honour is at stake.

“Soldiers,

“Look to the future with confidence and fight with courage.

**Object in  
view in  
posting the  
Belgian  
Army on the  
Yser.**

PLATE No. 10.  
[P. 89.]

“In whatever positions I may place you, you must always look forward and not back, and let him be regarded as a traitor to his country who pronounces the word retreat without its having been formally ordered.

“The moment has come, with the aid of our powerful Allies, to hunt from the soil of our beloved country the enemy who has invaded it, trampling under foot his treaty obligations and the sacred rights of a free people.

“ALBERT.”

These words did not conceal from the army the supreme effort which was to be demanded of it. Its task had assumed a special importance in view of the situation of the opposing forces in the north of France.

About the 15th October the French front was strongly prepared for defence as far as La Bassée. Since the end of September the German forces, replying to the enveloping movement of the Franco-British armies, was in its turn trying to turn the left wing of the latter. The German forces thus employed in the principal theatre of war were shortly to be joined, on the one hand, by the besieging army from Antwerp which was now available for other operations, and on the other, by the four newly formed corps of which the arrival in Belgium has already been mentioned (p. 64).

To oppose these powerful German forces and to counter the vast movement which they were about to undertake northwards between La Bassée and Dunkerque, there were in Flanders only the Belgian army, the 7th British Infantry and the 3rd British Cavalry Divisions, the French Marine Fusilier Brigade and two French Territorial Divisions.



The Belgian Army, to which had been attached the French Marine Fusiliers Brigade, took up its position on the Yser, between the sea and Zuydschoote. The British 7th Infantry and 3rd Cavalry Divisions were posted in front of Ypres.

The occupation of these positions was soon completed by the detraining of a British Cavalry Corps and of the British IIInd and IIIrd Army Corps at St. Omer, and by the advance on Ypres of the two French Territorial Divisions, whilst bodies of cavalry were directed on Staden and others were operating in the direction of Lille.

The result of these combined movements was apparent about the 17th, by which date, while the British 1st Army Corps was detraining at St. Omer, the British Cavalry Corps and IIInd and IIIrd Army Corps occupied a line extending from near La Bassée up to the positions of the 7th British Division, which was holding the line Zandvoorde-Gheluvelt-Zonnebeke. To the north of this latter line bodies of French and of British cavalry connected the front with the Belgian line.

Thus the line had been closed and a continuous front had been established.

The *joint operations* were now to commence.

In truth, this continuous front was but slenderly held in view of the great strength of the German forces which were concentrating between the Lys and the sea in order to try to pierce the line held by their adversaries, but reinforcements were being prepared to strengthen the portion of the line situated to the North of the Lys. These were:

The 1st British Corps which was, on the 21st October, to operate on the left of the British 7th Division on the front Zonnebeke-Langemarck;

The 42nd French Division, which was to come into action on the 23rd October on the Belgian front ;

The IXth French Army Corps, which was to fight to the east of Ypres, commencing on the 24th October ;

And the XVIth French Corps, which was to come into action south of Ypres on the 31st October.

But several days had to pass before these reinforcements could arrive, and it was necessary at all costs to gain time.

The enemy's plan was soon revealed ; it was to seize the line of the Yser, from the sea to Dixmude, and to hurl back the Belgian Army which was defending it, so as to turn the Franco-British left.

Thus it was the Belgian army which had to break the first shock of the enemy, and the French Headquarters Staff asked that it should resist during 48 hours.

**The ground  
and the  
positions.**

PLATE No. 11.  
[P. 91].

The front occupied by the Belgian army was formed, from the sea to the place called the "Fort of Knoeke," by the Yser river, which on that stretch is deepened and revetted to form a canal, and thence to Zuydschoote and Boesinghe by the Yser canal to Ypres. From Nieuport-Bains to Dixmude is 11 miles, and it is another 11 from Dixmude to Boesinghe, so that the total front was 22 miles in extent.

The Yser, about 65 feet wide, has dykes on both banks, that on the western bank commanding the one on the eastern by  $6\frac{1}{2}$  feet. About half-way

between Nieuport and Dixmude the river forms a bend, the concavity of which is turned towards the west. This bend, called the "bend of Tervaele," constituted a weak point in the line of defence.

The whole region is intersected by ditches, canals and streams, the most important of the latter being the Beverdyk, which is continued by the Noord-Vaart. Its course is nearly parallel to that of the Yser, and it attains to a width of about 32 feet up stream from Nieuport. The Beverdyk flows in almost its entire course between the Yser and the railway line from Nieuport to Dixmude, which has an embankment three to six feet high commanding the plain. The permanent crossings over the river and canal in the portion under consideration are: the Nieuport bridges, the Union bridge near St. Georges, that of Schoorbakke, that of Tervaele, the two Dixmude bridges, the Driegrachten, and the Steenstraat bridges.

At Nieuport six canals and water-courses converge: the Furnes canal, the Noord-Vaart, the canalised Yser, the Nieuwendamme brook, or Old Yser, the Plasschendaële canal, and the evacuation canal. There are sluices which enable water to be let in from the sea at high tide.

These few data will enable an idea to be formed of the ground to be defended.

At the beginning of the battle the Belgian forces were disposed as follows, in the position:

The 2nd Division had to defend the ground from the sea to a point some distance beyond the Union bridge, occupying Lombaertzyde and Mannekensvere, and holding the bridge-head in front of Nieuport so as to retain possession of the bridges and sluices.

The 1st Division had to defend the ground on the right of the 2nd Division as far as Mark 10 of the Yser, and to hold a bridge-head in advance of the Schoorbakke front, and further to occupy Schoore as an advanced post.

The 4th Division came next, from Mark 10 to Mark 14, with advanced posts at Keyem and at Beerst.

The French Marine Fusiliers, the 11th and 12th line regiments, with two artillery groups from the 3rd Division, prolonged the front of the 4th Division and occupied, in advance of Dixmude, a bridge-head which covered the railway lines from Dixmude to Nieuport and to Furnes, by which the transport of the Ostend base towards France was still being completed.

The 5th Division was in the neighbourhood of Noordschoote.

The 6th Division, south of the last named, connected the line with that of the French territorials towards Boesinghe.

The 3rd Division had two brigades in reserve near Lampernisse.

The 1st Cavalry Division covered the right flank of the army, and co-operated with the French cavalry in the direction of Roulers; the 2nd was in reserve between Nieuport and Furnes.

Thus on a front of 22 miles, two infantry brigades and one cavalry division were the only reserves at the disposal of the commander.

16th/24th  
October :  
The Belgian  
defence of  
the Nieuport-  
Dixmude  
front.

By the afternoon of the 15th, it had already become apparent that the Germans were preparing an attack on the front Nieuport-Dixmude.

On the 16th, contact was established east of the Yser, towards St. Pierre Capelle, and a reconnaissance in force was made by the enemy on Dixmude.

On the 17th, German columns were reported: In the north, along the Plasschendaele canal, from Leffinghe on Slype and from Ghistelles on Zevecote; in the south, from Staden on Zarren, which indicated an advance of the enemy's forces towards the front Nieuport-Dixmude. The German artillery was in action at Slype, and was shelling Rattevalle. **17th October**

In order to reinforce the front Nieuport-Dixmude, the 5th Division was brought back into the second line near Lampernisse, thus bringing up the number of divisions in reserve to two; the 3rd Division was placed near Avecapelle. The gap left open by the departure of the 5th Division was closed by a brigade detached from the 6th Division and posted near Noordschoote.

The attack on the outposts began on the 18th. Before Nieuport the German troops took Mannekensvere, which was afterwards partially recaptured. Lombaertzyde, defended by the 5th regiment of the line, held its own, supported by a British flotilla, which was soon increased by the arrival of some French ships; these warships shelled the German troops along the coast as far as Middelkerke, and subsequently, during the whole battle, furnished valuable support to the defence. **18th October**

The two advanced posts of Schoore and Keyem fell into the hands of the enemy, but that of Beerst was successfully held.

Fresh dispositions were made to reinforce the line; the presence of large bodies of Franco-British cavalry in the neighbourhood of Roulers was considered a sufficient safeguard for the right wing of the army, and the 6th Division was accordingly withdrawn, being replaced by French territorials. At that moment the reserves were posted as follows: the 3rd Division near Wulpen, the 5th near Oostkerke and

the 6th near Lampernisse. The 1st Cavalry Division, while co-operating with the French cavalry, was ordered to keep in close touch with the right of the army.

**19th October** On the 19th, the German attacks were aimed against the left and the centre of the army, from Lombaertzyde to Beerst, which latter place fell into the enemy's hands.

Owing to the imminence of a determined attack on the centre, the 6th Division was ordered to establish itself at Pervyse.

At the same time, to relieve the pressure on the left and centre, a counter-attack was decided on against the enemy's left flank; the 5th Division was ordered to attack Vladsloo, and the Marine Fusiliers were to move against Beerst. The 11th and 12th Regiments of the Line were ordered to occupy the bridge-head of Dixmude.

This offensive movement was at first successful; Beerst and Vladsloo were occupied, when information was received to the effect that strong German columns of all arms had debouched to the north and to the south of Roulers, and that the Franco-British cavalry which was operating in that region was retreating. This was judged to render the position of the Marine Fusiliers and of the 5th Division, on the right bank, too exposed, and these troops were accordingly recalled to the left bank of the Yser.

**20th October** Except for a violent bombardment of the whole front, the only important incident on the 20th was a double attack carried out at the two extremities of the line.

The most determined attack was that which was directed, from 6 a.m. onwards,

against Lombaertzyde and the farm of Bamburgh, east of Nieuport. By evening these two posts had been lost, but the enemy had been unable to debouch from them. The situation had, however, become serious on account of the very heavy artillery and infantry fire.

At the other end of the line, near Dixmude, an attack which had taken place in the afternoon was repulsed.

21st October

During this time the concentration of the enemy's forces was completed. They were thus echeloned in front of the Belgian army: The 4th Ersatz Division was opposite Nieuport; the IIIrd Reserve Corps, from Nieuport to Keyem; the XXIInd Reserve Corps, north of Dixmude; lastly, the XXIIIrd Reserve Corps at Dixmude and to the south—making in all a total of seven divisions opposed to the Belgian army. In presence of such a gathering of forces it became necessary that the exact front to be held should be clearly defined. The Belgian and French Headquarters Staffs agreed that the defence by the Belgian army of the line of the Yser should not go beyond St. Jacques Capelle, which meant holding a front of  $12\frac{1}{2}$  miles. At the same time steps were taken to complete the defence of the line towards the south by French troops, to prevent the flank of the army being turned on its right.

During the night of the 20th/21st, and all day on the 21st, the whole front was subjected to an extremely violent bombardment. The German artillery fire was directed now against the first lines, now against the ground in rear of these, so as to make it impossible for reserves to be moved up into the firing line; certain trenches were entirely destroyed. There was little infantry fighting.

Near Dixmude, however, violent night attacks were launched from Beerst on

the 12th Regiment of the Line. Alternating with heavy shell-fire, the assaults were continued in the afternoon, and were so persistent that two battalions of the 5th Division had to be called up to support the defence of this point. At one moment the trenches of the bridge-head, south of Dixmude, were lost, but a counter-attack recovered them.

At the end of the day, on the 21st, the general situation of the army was critical, since it had had to put in the greater part of its reserves in order to hold its positions.

**22nd October**

Towards the end of the night of the 21st/22nd the first serious incident of the battle occurred. Under cover of the darkness the enemy gained possession of a temporary bridge thrown near Tervaete, and got across to the left bank. A series of counter-attacks failed to drive back the enemy on to the right bank; they were carried out in the afternoon by the 2nd and 4th Regiments of the Line, belonging to the 1st Division, and by the 8th Line Regiment of the 4th Division, supported by the Grenadiers and the Carbineers. A battalion of Grenadiers, however, succeeded in reaching the Yser dyke, but being insufficiently supported, had to retire during the following night. These offensive actions were very costly in lives and greatly used up the troops taking part in them. The enemy succeeded in consolidating his positions on the west bank of the river, and in deploying infantry there, supported by numerous machine guns.

However, the Belgian Artillery never ceased shelling the bend of the river in order to render the position untenable for the enemy, and to prevent him from throwing foot-bridges across. All attempts made by the enemy to cross the river elsewhere failed signally. A determined attack on the Schoorbakke bridge-head was



repulsed during the morning, and violent assaults were unable to dislodge the 4th Line Regiment which was holding this position.

On both ends of the front the bombardment was continuous. Before Nieuport, a withdrawal of the German troops was taken advantage of for an advance towards Lombaertzyde and the farm of Bamburgh; the 1st Regiment of Rifles and the 9th Line Regiment carried this operation out successfully. At Dixmude it was apparent that the desperate fighting of the previous day, which, moreover, had been resumed during part of the night, had weakened the enemy.

On the 23rd a French reinforcement, the 42nd Division, arrived on the scene, **23rd October** but was directed on Nieuport to assume the offensive in that sector.

The centre of the front, about the bend of Tervaete, where the enemy was concentrating all his efforts, remained without succour, and the situation there soon became critical.

During the night the bridge-head of Schoorbakke had had to be abandoned, the battalion which was holding it having been enfiladed. The bridge was blown up just as German troops were approaching it to cross. The Headquarters Staff ordered the chord of the arc to be held at all costs by clinging to every inch of the ground. In the whole extent of the bend the troops, supported by all the Belgian reserves available, resisted the artillery and machine-gun fire. Whenever they fell back their leaders took them forward again.

In the evening the supporting positions which had been prepared along the chord of the bend were still occupied, but it was reported that "the troops are

exhausted and shaken in moral, so that the slightest incident may cause them to be seized with panic." The various corps were considerably reduced in strength; the 1st Regiment of Carbineers, for instance, only numbered six officers and 325 men.

At Dixmude the Commander of the brigade also reported that his men were very fatigued.

Before St. Georges, the 7th Line Regiment, which occupied trenches at that place which had been continuously attacked since the battle began, was relieved by the 14th Line Regiment.

At the end of the day, the Army Command, considering the situation opposite the bend to be grave, addressed to the French Army Command a definite request for intervention in the centre of the Belgian front. "Energetic action on the part of as great a number as possible, of the troops of the 42nd Division (engaged on the Nieuport side) can," it was stated, "still save the situation." In the night the Commander of the French troops in Belgium decided to comply, in part, with this request, and sent a brigade of the 42nd Division to operate in the bend. It was to come into action on the 24th, at dawn.

**24th/31st  
October:  
The French  
reinforce-  
ments;  
the inunda-  
tions;  
the enemy's  
effort is  
broken.  
24th October**

While on the 24th efforts were being made to restore order amongst the units which had become mixed up in the course of the numerous attacks, the centre was ordered to hold out to the last extremity, so as to give time for the French intervention to take effect. The enemy, however, displayed extraordinary activity in this region, so that the Belgian troops were forced to retire and to defend the line of the Beverdyk. A French counter-attack failed to throw the enemy back.

Before St. Georges, the 14th Line Regiment, subjected to an extremely violent bombardment, and having had its right flank turned, was obliged to retire behind the Noord-Vaart after having repulsed numerous attacks.

At the southern end the enemy attempted a supreme effort on Dixmude. During the night he made furious attacks against the defenders of the town; fifteen assaults were delivered and all were repulsed by the Belgian troops and by the French Marine Fusiliers. During the day the attacks were renewed, and the trenches south of the bridge-head had to be given up, but soon the Belgian troops were brought back to their positions and the enemy's offensive was broken. Here also the troops were completely exhausted and not a man was left available in reserve, so that reliefs could no longer be organised; one Belgian battalion was 72 hours in the trenches, two others 43 hours.

In view of all these circumstances the Belgian Army Command insisted that French reinforcements should be sent to remedy the situation in the centre of the Belgian line, and it was decided that this should be done next day, when almost the whole 42nd Division was ordered from the left wing to support the centre.

The 25th October was marked by a distinct pause in the enemy's onslaught. **25th October**  
The bombardment was less violent, and the few infantry attacks which were undertaken were feebly conducted; thus there were evident signs of the enemy's exhaustion. At the same time the German forces successfully resisted an attack from Oud-Stuyvekenskerke on their left flank by a French brigade and the 5th Belgian Division.

That evening the army had maintained its positions on the Noord-Vaart and

the Beverdyk, while beyond it still held Oud-Stuyvekenskerke and the Yser dyke from kilometre 15, and retained the Nieuport and Dixmude bridge-heads. The comparative calm allowed units to be reconstituted and order restored in them. The number of men disabled was considerable: "By 6 p.m.," says a report, "9,145 wounded had been evacuated by rail; the number of wounded in hospital on the spot, increased by the number of deaths during transit from the battlefield to the evacuating railway stations, is estimated at 1,000. To these figures must be added the number of dead on the battlefield, of the wounded not recovered, and of the missing."

In the course of the day the Headquarters Staff went into the question of a retirement to the line of the Nieuport-Dixmude railway embankment, and considered the necessity of constructing an important obstacle in the front of this line of defence. A plan was worked out for inundating the area lying between the above embankment and the Yser dyke, and with a view to this, dams were ordered to be constructed across the aqueducts which pass under the embankment. All that then remained necessary was to open, at Nieuport, the sluices giving access towards the Beverdyk, and to shut them at low tide, in order to submerge successively all the ground on which the German lines were being developed.

**26th October**

On the 26th a new factor began to aggravate the situation.

Since the beginning of the battle of the Yser the Belgian guns and howitzers had been continuously in action, trying by their constant fire to make up for the weakness of the army in men, and to counterbalance the superiority of the enemy in heavy artillery. The strenuous use made of the artillery rendered many pieces

unserviceable, and reduced the available ammunition to such a point that the batteries now had only one hundred rounds per gun left.

In the early hours of the morning, on the left as well as in the centre of the front, the line of the Beverdyk had to be abandoned under the violent pressure of the enemy, who was able to enfilade the positions of the defence. The line of the railway was ordered to be held at all costs. At various points the exhausted troops could only resist the attacks, which were made by night and by day, at the cost of considerable losses; here and there they gave way and abandoned the line, but were able to regain it and to cling to it afterwards. On the right wing, round Dixmude, the troops, kept on the alert by continual attacks, reached the extreme limit of their physical and moral resistance; two battalions of Senegalese arrived in time to relieve the most worn-out of the defenders.

That evening the bridge-head of Nieuport was still successfully held, as well as the railway from Nieuport to Mark 4; the line then passed towards Oud-Stuyvekenskerke and joined the Yser dyke near Mark 16, following it as far as the Dixmude bridge-head. The Army Command, in order to meet every eventuality, disposed the two Cavalry Divisions at the various bridges over the canal, from Furnes to Loo.

In contrast to the 26th, the 27th and 28th October passed in comparative calm. There was a violent but intermittent cannonade, directed partly against the positions, partly against the ground in rear of the railway, and the few attacks which were made were repulsed successfully. The enemy's activity was more apparent than real.

The respite was taken advantage of to withdraw the second line units (3rd and

**27th/28th  
October**

6th Divisions) which had become merged in the firing line, and thus to reconstitute reserves. The preparatory work on the inundations having been completed, the sluices of the Beverdyk were opened at Nieuport, and from the 28th the waters began to rise opposite the front of the 2nd Division.

**29th October** The enemy's activity was renewed on the 29th. A heavy bombardment and violent attacks were directed against the 1st, 2nd and 4th Divisions. The inundations spread all along the front of the 2nd Division and gained ground towards the south.

**30th October** The attacks became more persistent on the 30th, both on the left and on the centre of the line, but were everywhere repulsed, except opposite Ramscapelle, where the enemy, throwing bombs into the trenches, gained a footing on the railway, and pushed forward to the village. This was the only point at which the line was pierced. A counter-attack, preceded by violent preparatory artillery fire, was made against Ramscapelle, in the afternoon and during the following night, by the 6th Line Regiment, a battalion of the 7th, a battalion of the 14th, and two French battalions. It was entirely successful, the Ramscapelle wayside station being re-occupied by the Belgian and French troops, so that the line of defence was reconstituted as before.

On the other parts of the front the enemy showed no more activity whatever, and the bombardment diminished in intensity. Everywhere the inundations continued to progress, and already made the trenches between the railway embankment and the Yser dyke untenable by the enemy in many places.

The battle of the Yser was over.

The enemy's advance had been stopped, and soon he only held a few centres of resistance on the left bank of the Yser. He retired, abandoning wounded, arms, and ammunition.

But the losses of the Belgian army had been very serious, amounting to 14,000 men killed and wounded. The infantry was reduced from 48,000 to 32,000 rifles, and more than half the guns of the artillery were temporarily unserviceable.

This long and heroic resistance broke the onslaught of seven German Divisions, inflicting considerable losses on them, and rendering them incapable of further action for a long while, and time was thus gained which allowed of the Franco-British front being strongly established to the south, and of a barrier being set up against which all the German attacks were to come to nothing during the great battles round Ypres at the end of October and during the first fortnight in November.

During the two succeeding months the operations on the Yser front were confined to slow gains or losses of ground.

On the 3rd November, Belgian reconnaissances advanced as far as Lombaertzyde ; one of them crossed the Yser south of St. Georges and reached the outskirts of Mannekensvere on the right bank. On the other wing the French tried to enlarge the Dixmude bridge-head.

On the 4th November, Belgian forces attacked Lombaertzyde and occupied it, but a violent counter-attack, made at nightfall, drove them back to the Nieupoort bridge-head, where the assailants, however, were unable to gain a footing.

**31st October/  
31st Decem-  
ber :  
The Yser  
front is  
maintained.**

On the 8th and 10th November, the attempt was renewed by the 81st French Territorial Division, which got up to within 200 metres of the German trenches and there established itself.

Attacks made simultaneously on St. Georges, Schoorbakke and Tervaele were not productive of substantial gain, the approaches to the enemy's positions having to be made by the existing narrow passages through the inundations.

Commencing on the 9th a new attempt was made by the enemy against Dixmude. The ruins of the town and its approaches towards Caeskerke were first subjected to an uninterrupted shell fire.

On the 10th at noon, after a bombardment of the trenches, an assault succeeded in breaking through the line. The 1st Line Regiment and the French Marine Fusiliers defended themselves most stubbornly. At 6.15 p.m. the enemy reached the Yser, but he was unable to get any further.

The capture of the ruins of Dixmude marked the end of the enemy's offensive operations, and he thereafter confined himself to an intermittent bombardment of the ground adjoining the Yser. This cannonade was sometimes extended as far as Furnes, which is  $7\frac{1}{2}$  miles in rear of the river.

The activity of the Belgian army during this period was principally manifested by reconnaissances and by pushing forward small bodies of infantry across the inundations to the little islands formed by isolated farms.

Towards the middle of December a more serious operation resulted in the occupation of St. Georges, which had remained in the enemy's hands. A French mixed force, supported by portions of the Belgian 2nd and 4th Divisions, began the



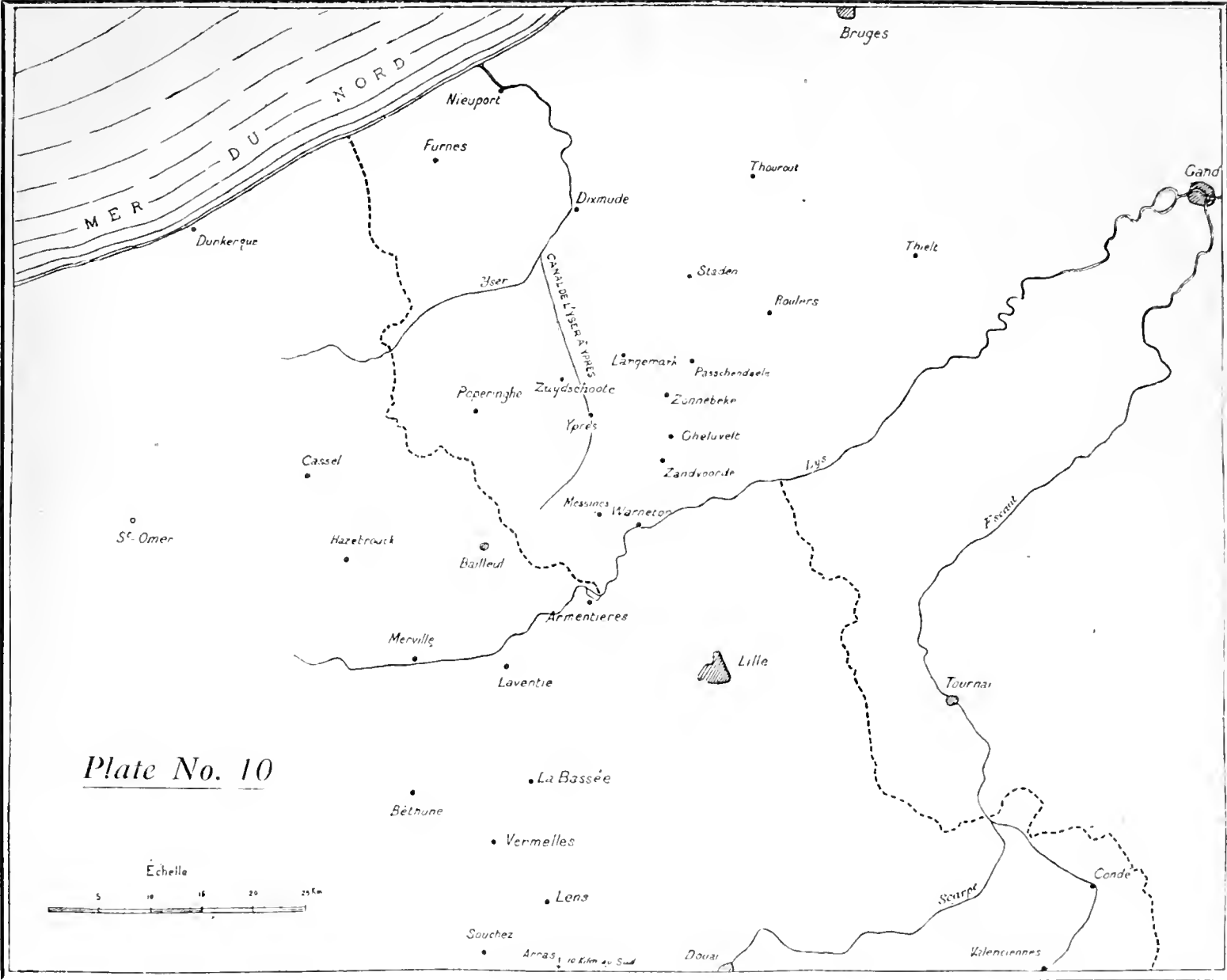
attack on the Lombaertzyde side. At the same time the other Belgian divisions in first line pushed reconnaissances in force towards the various points occupied by the enemy. The attack progressed slowly under a continuous bombardment. On the left, ground was gained step by step, till on the 16th the front of attack extended to the sea. During the night of the 16th/17th, the French troops repulsed, at Lombaertzyde, seven determined attacks of the enemy, and on the 18th they were able to establish themselves definitely at 100 metres from the German positions. They also gradually approached St. Georges, which they captured on the 28th December. At the end of 1914, the enemy held on the left bank of the Yser, only a few listening and observation posts, scattered in the flooded plain.



*Plate No. 10*

COMBINED FRONT WITH THE ARMIES OF THE GUARANTEEING POWERS.







*Plate No. 11*

BATTLE OF THE YSER.





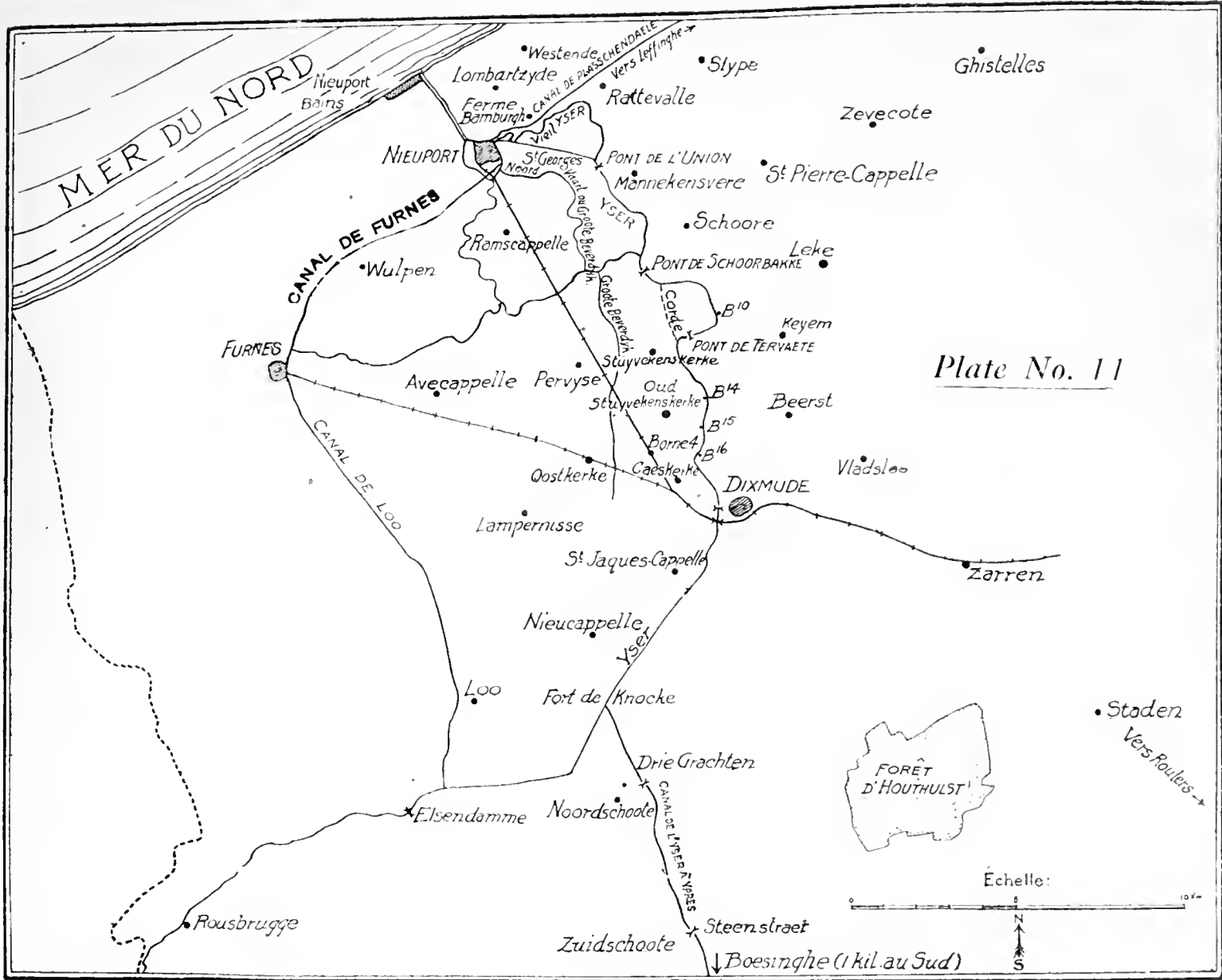


Plate No. 11



## IX.

### GENERAL SUMMARY.

Up to the moment when, on the night of the 3rd to the 4th August, more than twenty-four hours after the receipt of the German threatening Note, Belgium had become certain that Germany was about to violate her frontiers, the Belgian army remained distributed in the country in accordance with the military exigencies dictated by the neutrality of Belgium; one advanced guard division faced towards England, two others towards France, and a fourth towards Germany.

The violation of Belgian neutrality imposed on Belgium certain obligations; the corresponding measures were decreed immediately.

The plan of defence, the realisation of which was pursued throughout by the Army Command with resolution and consistency, was in strict accord with the undertaking which Belgium had on the 4th August assumed towards the guaranteeing Powers, namely, to organise with the forces of these latter, "both concerted action and joint operations, with a view to

safeguarding the independence and the integrity of the country." This plan consisted, in the face of the very superior hostile forces, in denying, at all times, as great a portion as possible of Belgian territory to the invader, and in establishing the army, for this purpose, on such defensive lines as would enable resistance to be offered under favourable conditions, in concert with the forces of the guaranteeing Powers.

At the same time the plan aimed at avoiding the exposure of the army, guardian of the Nation, to certain loss, if the junction with those forces should not have been effected before the arrival of the enemy's masses.

It was only on the Yser that the junction with the armies of the Guaranteeing Powers was able to be effected, and that a continuous line of defence was constituted. By that time almost the whole territory was in the hands of the invaders, but the Field Army had remained intact and was ready for a stubborn resistance in joint operations.

At the critical moment of the campaign, on the 18th August, when it became necessary to abandon the position on the Gette, as on the 6th October when the retreat towards Flanders had to be undertaken, and similarly during the retreat itself, the decisions arrived at were in all cases inspired by these leading principles of the plan of defence.

The Field Army was at all times confronted by hostile forces considerably superior both in numbers and in armament, except before Antwerp from the 22nd August to the 25th September, and yet, on the Gette, about the middle of August, as at Antwerp in the beginning of October, it held on to its positions up to the extreme limit compatible with its preservation, thus affording to the armies of the Guaranteeing Powers the maximum of time in which to come to its aid. When the Belgian Field Army took up its position on the line of the Yser, the only diminution its fighting strength had suffered after two-and-a-half months of war, was due to the losses incurred on the battlefield; no single formed unit had been captured by the enemy.

Before Antwerp, from the 22nd August to the 25th September, the Belgian army devoted itself to lightening the task of the armies of the Guaranteeing Powers. During that period it took advantage of every favourable opportunity to attack the army of observation which was opposed to it. It constantly detained in its front hostile forces at least its equal in strength, and often its superior, at moments when their support was urgently required in the principal theatre of war.

After a retreat of nearly ninety miles, when the junction had been effected on the Yser, the Belgian army, with the support of a French

brigade, subsequently reinforced by a division, was able to break the violent efforts of an army of 150,000 men on a defensive front, which, by this decisive resistance, it has rendered safe from further attack.

Lastly, the Army Command, also in accordance with the engagements assumed by Belgium, organised the defence of the fortresses of Liege, Namur and Antwerp. But the besiegers, owing to the power of their artillery, possessed so great a superiority that the fortified positions were unable to offer a prolonged resistance.

Thus, from whatever point of view the operations of the Belgian army, during the period under review, are considered, it may be claimed that Belgium as scrupulously fulfilled the obligations imposed by her neutrality, when once it had been trampled on, as she had adhered to them while still sheltered under the guarantee of the Treaties.

# *Table of Contents.*

---

## I.—Preliminaries.

	PAGE
<b>29th July :</b> Placing of the army on a reinforced peace footing ... ..	1
<b>31st July :</b> Mobilisation of the army, and plan of defence ... ..	2
<b>2nd August :</b> German Note demanding free passage for her armies through Belgium	3
<b>4th August :</b> Violation of the frontier by the German troops ... ..	5
Principles followed in the organisation of the defence of the country ... ..	6

## II.—Defence of Liège.

	PAGE
<b>4th August :</b> First contacts ... ..	11
<b>5th August :</b> Defence of the section of the Meuse below its junction with the Vesdre	12
<b>Night of 5th/6th August :</b> Defence of the section of the Meuse above its junction with the Ourthe ... ..	12
<b>6th August :</b> Retirement of the mobile garrison on to the main body of the army ...	13

## III.—Operations in combination with the armies of the Guaranteeing Powers during the period 6th to

### 20th August.

	PAGE
<b>6th August :</b> Selection of the defensive position on the Gette ... ..	17
<b>12th August :</b> Battle of Haelen ... ..	19
<b>18/20th August :</b> The army, threatened by eleven German Corps, and unsupported, retires on to the Antwerp position ... ..	21

## IV.—Defence of Namur.

	PAGE
<b>5th/20th August :</b> First contacts... ..	33
<b>21st/23rd August :</b> Defence of the forts and intervals ... ..	34
<b>23rd August :</b> Retreat of the Namur Division towards France ... ..	36

## V.—Operations in combination with the Armies of the Guaranteeing Powers, 20th August to 27th September.

	PAGE
Nature of the Operations during this period ...	39
<b>25th/26th August:</b> Sortie during the battles of the Sambre and of Mons ...	40
<b>4th/9th September:</b> Advance intended to keep open the line of retreat towards the West ...	41
<b>9th/13th September:</b> Sortie after the battle of the Marne ...	42
<b>22nd September:</b> Destruction of the railways ...	44
<b>25th/27th September:</b> Advance after the battle of the Aisne ...	44

## VI.—Defence of Antwerp.

	PAGE
<b>28th/29th September:</b> Earliest effects of the German heavy artillery ...	49
Defensive dispositions and preparation of the final positions ...	50
<b>30th September to 6th/8th October:</b> Defence of the forts and intervals ...	52

## VII.—Operations in combination with the Armies of the Guaranteeing Powers, 6th to 15th October.

	PAGE
The situation early in October ...	59
<b>6th/10th October:</b> The army eludes invest- ment; capitulation of Antwerp ...	61
<b>10th/15th October:</b> The army takes up a position on the Yser ...	63

## VIII.—Joint Operations with the Armies of the Guaranteeing Powers. Battle of the Yser.

	PAGE
Task of the Army on the line of the Yser ...	69
The Region and the Positions ...	72
<b>16th/24th October:</b> Belgian defence of the front Nieuport-Dixmude ...	75
<b>24th/31st October:</b> French reinforcements; the inundations; the enemy's effort broken ...	81
<b>31st October to 31st December:</b> The line of the Yser is held successfully ...	85

## IX.—General Summary.









D  
541  
A5  
V.1

THE LIBRARY  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
Santa Barbara

---

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE  
STAMPED BELOW.

---

UL SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



AA 000 291 121 2

