

had been beaten out of his positions over a great stretch of front. "During the night of September 2nd—3rd he fell back rapidly on the whole front of the Third Army. By the end of the day he had taken up positions along the general line of the Canal du Nord from Peronne to Ytres, and thence east of Hermies, Inchy en Artois and Ecourt St. Quentin to the Sensee east of Lecluse."* The retirement was promptly followed up. At 5.20 a.m. on September 3rd the 17th Royal Fusiliers began to advance. Only two hours before, they had reached the position, relieving another battalion, on a line about 1,000 yards east of Vaux-Vraucourt. With A Company (Captain Ashwell) on the right and B (Captain Sword) on the left, the battalion rapidly advanced to the first objective, about 5,000 yards from their starting point, and they were ordered to resume their progress at 1 p.m. Major Smith, the adjutant, who rode forward to give final instructions, could not locate the battalion at first; and they did not resume the advance until 2.30 p.m. Doignies was soon passed, but about 1,000 yards to the east they were held up by machine-gun fire from the neighbourhood of Boursies. At this point two platoons of C Company were sent up to make good the casualties in B Company. At 6.20 p.m. the advance was resumed with the help of artillery, and Demicourt was taken. At 6.55 p.m. positions were taken up covering Demicourt and Boursies, which B Company occupied. At the latter village they were in touch with the Guards, and on the left they were in contact with the South Staffords. The battalion had been advancing almost continuously for over thirteen hours, prepared for anything, in verification of an inference of the high command. In this period they had covered some 9,500 yards,† at a total cost of 52 casualties.

The next day the 13th Royal Fusiliers carried on the

* Despatch.

† The difficulty of representing most movements on a map, except of large scale, and the striking ease with which this movement can be shown on a map of almost any reasonable scale, shows sufficiently how times were changing.

advance a little to the south, but their progress was more chequered, and at the end of the day they encountered a firm resistance. They set out at 7 a.m. from near Hermies, with the purpose of taking up a line east of Havrincourt. But they had only advanced 200 yards before they were held up by machine-gun and trench-mortar fire from the right flank. But the trench mortars were put out of action and the machine guns compelled to retire, and the advance was continued. The Canal du Nord runs roughly parallel to the railway about 1,100 yards south of Hermies, and then turns northward about 2,000 yards east of the village. Near the bend, on the southern side, is the north-western extension of Havrincourt Wood. At the west corner of the wood a platoon crossed the canal to the south. The 1/1 Herts, who were on the right of the 13th Battalion, were at this point 500 yards in the rear; and the Royal Fusiliers were suffering from enfilade fire from this quarter. After a halt to enable the Herts to come up the advance was resumed due eastward, and Lewis guns were established on Yorkshire Bank. The right were now once more out of touch, and Germans could be seen moving up in the wood at the bend of the canal. The right company were then withdrawn to the tunnel under the canal a little to the west. On the left the line was established in front of Square Copse, and in the evening touch was achieved with the 2nd Division. The battalion had covered about 2,500 yards in their advance, but under greater difficulties than had faced the 17th Battalion. The next two days patrols were pushed out eastward, and the position consolidated in depth at the same time that it was being advanced.

But the enemy resistance had now definitely hardened on this part of the front, and the 23rd Royal Fusiliers, attacking east of Doignies (September 7th), suffered very heavily. The Canal du Nord, with the approaches swept by enemy fire, formed a formidable line of resistance. Below, from the neighbourhood of Havrincourt, the main line was the Hindenburg system; and at this time the