

Argonne forest which had been quiet for many months and was thinly held by both the opposing forces. In rear of their front lines, the Germans had, however, constructed three strongly fortified alternative positions. On the morning of September 26, the First American and Fourth French Army accordingly attacked on both sides of the Argonne between the Meuse and Suippe rivers. The right flank of the American army was covered by the Meuse; its left wing was, however, obliged to force its way through a region of hills, ravines and thick woods, obstructed by numerous entanglements and trenches. Although this movement appears to have taken the Germans by surprise to some extent, reserves were soon brought and the advance was checked. On the right the first and second lines of defence were taken with several thousand prisoners. West of the Argonne the French penetrated to the German second line, where they were held up.

The British First and Third Armies, on the evening of September 26, occupied a front extending from the village of Selency, west of St. Quentin, through Gouzeaucourt and Havrincourt to the marshy and inundated country on the banks of the Sensée river at Ecourt St. Quentin.

Between St. Quentin and Bantouzelle the main defences of the Hindenburg line lay generally on the east side of the Scheldt canal and were sited with great skill to prevent the occupation of suitable artillery positions for their attack. The canal itself was utilized to furnish cover for troops in reserve or rest and for the garrisons of the main trenches during a bombardment. Deep cuttings were numerous, being in some places sixty feet in depth, and in one case the canal passed through a tunnel for a distance of three and one-half miles. This tunnel was used to provide quarters for troops and was connected by shafts with trenches above. In the sides of the cuttings many tunnelled dug-outs and shelters of concrete had been constructed. Along the crest of the bank were numerous concealed machine gun emplacements. On the western side of the canal two well-organized lines of trenches ran parallel to it south of Bellicourt, where the canal cutting became shallow. They were protected by wide belts of wire entanglements. Many other trenches, switch lines and communication trenches, in most cases strongly wired, were constructed to strengthen weak points or gain desirable fields of fire. The entire defensive system, with numerous fortified villages, occupied a belt of country varying in width from seven to ten thousand yards, thoroughly organized with every device, revealed by four years' experience in active warfare. The northern portion of the canal was deemed too formidable an obstacle to attempt its passage in the face of the enemy. The extraordinary strength of the position made a prolonged artillery preparation necessary. This began during the night of September 26-27, along the whole front of all three armies, with the intention of deceiving the enemy as to the main point of an attack to be delivered by the First and Third Armies only. At 5.20 a.m. on September 27 the Canadian and three British corps began their advance in the direction of Cambrai, on a front of thirteen miles, extending from Gouzeaucourt northward. Assisted by sixty-