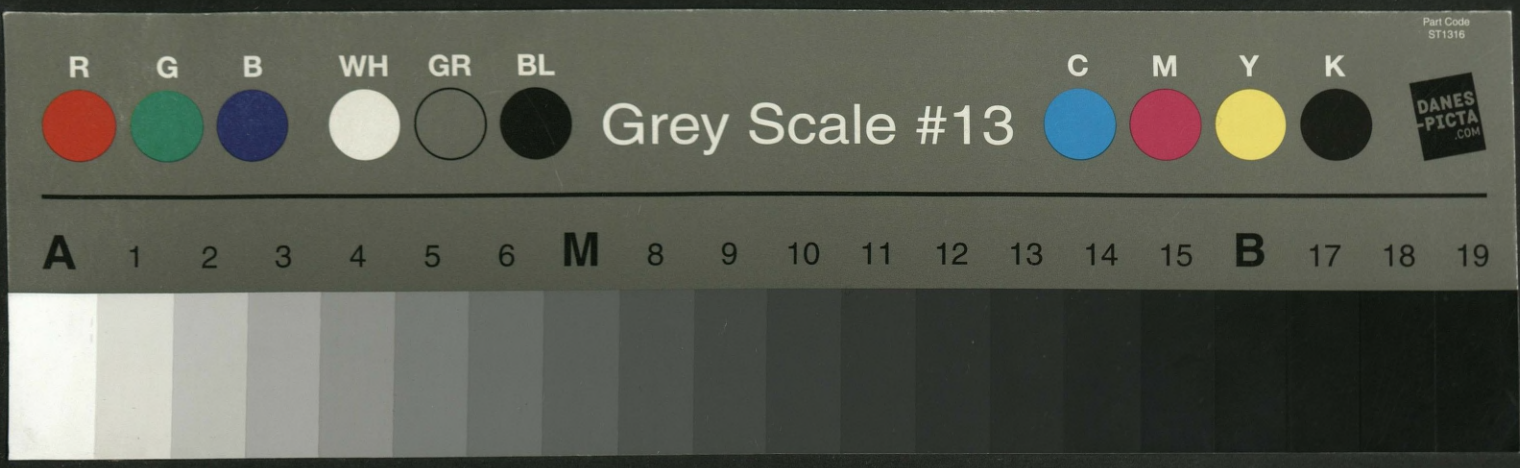


THE LAST FOUR MONTHS

THE END OF THE WAR IN THE WEST

MAJOR-GENERAL
SIR F. MAURICE
K·C·M·G; C·B



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By
MAJOR-GENERAL SIR F. MAURICE
K.C.M.G., C.B.

With Two Maps

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PREFACE

WHO won the war? is a question that has been often asked. In the countries of all the great Allied Powers there have been found those who answered it to their own satisfaction as patriots, because it is easy to demonstrate that the war would not have been won, as and when it was won, had any of those countries failed to do what it actually achieved. Most of us, however, are agreed that victory was the result of combination, and I am convinced that that opinion will grow stronger the better the story is known. During the struggle the news we received of the doings of the armies of our Allies was naturally even more limited than was that of the doings of our own men, and it was not easy to allot to each its place in the general scheme.

In this book I have sought to give a picture of Foch's great campaign and to sketch in due proportion the parts which went to make up the whole. The splendour of the achievements of our army is, I believe, enhanced when they are given their proper place in the frame. I have reduced my descriptions of the battles to the simplest terms, because my object is to explain the broad causes of success and of failure, and there is danger in entering into details of opera-

tions on so vast a scale of losing sight of the wood for the trees. As no story of a campaign can be complete unless it describes the intentions, aims and feelings of the enemy, at least at the most critical periods, I have collected the best information available on these points from captured documents or from publications in Germany. Fortunately, there has in that country been considerable public discussion between Hindenburg, Ludendorff and their critics as to the conduct of the former during the period with which I am here chiefly concerned, and material has not been lacking. Ludendorff's Reminiscences have appeared while this book was in the press. I have throughout referred to the German edition, as at the time I write the English translation has not been published. I owe grateful thanks to Captain C. T. Atkinson for kindly reading the proofs and for many valuable suggestions.

F. MAURICE.

LONDON,
August, 1919.

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THE LAST FOUR MONTHS

CHAPTER I

WHAT WENT BEFORE

Unity of Command—The British Reverses in the Spring

In Europe 1917 was a year of disappointment for the arms of the Allies; only in Asia, where our earlier ventures had failed, did fortune smile on us. At the beginning of that year Ludendorff and Hindenburg brought off their first coup on the Western front, when they withdrew the German forces from the awkward position in which they were placed as the result of the first battle of the Somme, and retired behind the Hindenburg line, which then first became famous. By this manœuvre they checked the plans of the Allies and brought about the failure of General Nivelle's great offensive upon which such high hopes had been set. The result of this failure had been to throw a great strain upon the British army, which had to obtain for the French the time to recover. In the battle of Arras we had won the greatest success yet gained by British arms in France, but Haig had been forced

to continue that battle to the stage when, the enemy having recovered from his first shock, progress was slow and losses were heavy. In June Plumer had brilliantly cleared the Messines Ridge and obliterated the Ypres salient, which for nearly three years had been a sore spot on our front; but the French still needed relief, and at the end of July the long, slow struggle which ended on the Passchendaele Ridge had begun. Then, just at the time when the German forces had been so weakened by that battle that there was good prospect of reaping at Cambrai the fruits of the year's campaign, there had come the surprise of Caporetto, the collapse of the Italian army on the Isonzo, its retreat with very heavy losses to the Piave, and the dispatch of large forces from France to the help of our Ally. In this year the Germans committed one of their cardinal blunders in proclaiming unlimited U-boat warfare, which added decisively to the number of their foes; but the consequences to themselves of that blunder were not immediate, while we at once saw our sea communications endangered and our people threatened with very serious privation if not starvation. In Mesopotamia Maude overcame the Turkish army at Kut and drove their beaten troops through Baghdad, while Allenby ended the year's campaigns with a triumph at Gaza and Beersheba and with the capture of Jerusalem. But history will certainly count the entry of the United States of America into the war

and the Russian Revolution as the two outstanding events of 1917, the two events which exercised the most far-reaching influence upon the course of the war.

Early in the year it had become apparent to the military authorities of the Allies that the results of the Russian Revolution would be felt before the military power of the United States could become effective on the Western front. In short, it was clear that the Germans were going to get a start in the race, just as they got a start in 1914, and that consequently the Allies would be faced with a period of danger in which they would have to stand on the defensive.

At a meeting of the Allied Commanders-in-Chief and chiefs of staff held in Paris in June, 1917, to consider the military policy of the Allies in these circumstances, it was recommended that some machinery should be established to ensure "unity of command." This was by no means the first time that this question had been mooted. In quite early days in the war various tentative proposals had been put forward with the object of ensuring better control and greater unity of action amongst the forces of the Allies, but the political difficulties had always proved insuperable.

Soon after Mr. Lloyd George became Prime Minister of Great Britain, a serious attempt was made to reach a practical solution at a conference between

the French and British Governments at Calais in February, 1917, and for the great offensive campaign planned for the spring of that year on the Western front the French Commander-in-Chief, General Nivelle, was given complete control. Unfortunately, the failure of General Nivelle's campaign gave a set-back to "unity of command," and encouraged those who were opposed to it in the belief that it was not desirable to place the army of one nation directly under the command of the general of another. It was not then recognised that there was a very important difference between entrusting the supreme command to the Commander-in-Chief of one army, whose mind and thoughts must necessarily be chiefly concerned with his own men and his own front, and placing it in the hands of one man who could stand back and look upon the front as a whole, free from the burden of the special charge of any one part of it. Also there was the question of finding the one man. Nivelle had failed, Joffre was on the shelf, and Foch was still under the shadow of his failure to take the Vimy Ridge in 1915. Thus, in spite of the recommendations of the Allied generals, nothing was done until the disaster to the Italian army at Caporetto produced a crisis.

Mr. Lloyd George, with his usual energy in an emergency, then proposed that a conference should be held between the British, French and Italian Governments for the purpose of establish-

ing an Allied organisation for the better control of the war. That conference was held in November, 1917, at Rapallo, on the Italian frontier, and it was then that the Supreme War Council, commonly known as the Versailles Council, was established. One of the objects of that step was to put the conferences of the Allied statesmen on a surer and more businesslike basis than had up till then existed. Before the Versailles Council was instituted the Allied Governments used to confer at irregular intervals when they had important questions to discuss, but there was no organisation available to prepare beforehand the business for such meetings or to supervise the execution of the decisions which were reached. For these reasons the Versailles Council supplied an obvious need and was a step in the right direction; but it did not and could not provide the means of exercising effective military command. In the first place the Council had no executive authority; it could only advise. In the second place the military representatives who formed the main part of the permanent organisation of the Council were each of them responsible to their own Governments, and had to refer back all important questions for the instructions of those Governments. Therefore decisions could only be reached slowly and after discussion, whereas in war it is essential that military decisions should be taken quickly and in accordance with one clear policy. The military side

of the Versailles organisation was of value in collecting and bringing together information from each of the Allied armies. This enabled it to tender general advice as to the policy to be followed several months ahead, but it was quite incapable of dealing with day-to-day emergencies or of issuing orders to the Allied Commanders-in-Chief.

After the Versailles Council was established at Rapallo Mr. Lloyd George came home through Paris, where he made the famous speech in which he commented scathingly on the conduct of the war by the Allies. He asserted that each of the weaker members of the Alliance had been sacrificed in turn, while France and Great Britain were knocking their heads against what he termed the impenetrable barrier in the West. This speech aroused a great deal of criticism. That criticism was mainly of two kinds. There were those who realised that the Versailles Council did not provide for the danger which was facing us, that it did not, in fact, produce effective "unity of command." These critics were not opposed to "unity of command," but were opposed to what they regarded as an inadequate measure. The second group of critics was opposed to the Versailles Council because they were suspicious of any weakening of the control of Parliament over the Army, and they regarded an attempt to place the military forces of the Allies under an international organisation as a blow at the sovereign rights of the

people. This group may be regarded as composed of out and out opponents of "unity of command" in any form. A good deal of confusion was caused by lumping these two bodies of critics together and by classing the many soldiers who desired "unity of command," but refused to recognise the Versailles Council as a practical military organisation, with those who were opposed to "unity of command" mainly for political reasons.

While these discussions were going on the Germans were acting, and from the beginning of November onward they were moving troops from the Russian to the French front as fast as their trains could carry them. It was calculated that the Germans would be able to increase their strength on the Western front between the beginning of November and the end of April by not less than a million and a half of men, and that they would be able to bring over a very large number of aeroplanes and heavy guns which they would no longer require on the Eastern front. In these circumstances the military authorities of the Allies began pressing their Governments for more effective measures to meet the coming blow, and amongst those measures there was a demand for something better calculated to ensure "unity of command" than the Versailles Council. Keen observers in the United States of America, standing at a greater distance from the war and able to take a calmer and more general view of the whole

vast conflict, had long been insisting on the need for really effective unified control, and at the time of the Rapallo conference the United States Government had proposed that the Versailles Council should be vested with executive authority. The French Government was frankly in favour of the appointment of a generalissimo, but as this office would naturally fall to a French general there was some reluctance to appear to force it upon an Ally, and Mr. Lloyd George was not ready to go so far.

This, then, was the direction in which matters were moving at the beginning of 1918, when a conference was held at Versailles to consider the Allied plan of campaign for that year. At that conference it was decided to form an Executive Military Council, composed of a French, a British, an American and an Italian general, with General Foch as chairman, and that this body should be given authority to co-ordinate the strategy of the Allied Commanders-in-Chief, to create a general reserve to be under its control, and to employ that reserve in accordance with the needs of the situation.

The institution of this body produced another crisis, for the British Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir William Robertson, objected that no committee could exercise effective command, and he asked to be permitted to resign rather than to work with it. The British Government offered him the alternative of becoming the British representative on the Execu-

tive Council or of remaining as Chief of the Staff and working with the Executive Council. Sir William Robertson replied that, as he did not believe that the Executive Council could be an efficient military organisation, he could not work with it in either capacity, and his resignation was accordingly accepted.

These various events all produced the impression that British soldiers were in general opposed to "unity of command." In fact, however, many of them had long been working hard to find some solution of the difficulties which stood in the way of the realisation of what they regarded as a necessary measure. The majority of them were, however, certainly opposed to what they considered to be an ineffective compromise. The history of war teaches that committees have never been able to command, that they lead invariably to delay and compromise, and these things are fatal in war. The Austrian Aulic Council and the Dutch Field Deputies of the War of the Spanish Succession have been deservedly held up to ridicule by all history, and most soldiers were whole-heartedly opposed to proposals which appeared to savour of the repetition of such ill-advised measures. However, the length of the war, its enormous cost in life and treasure, the many failures of the Allied generals, and the fact that the hopes which they had expressed had been very rarely fulfilled, all tended to confirm the statesmen in

their view that what was needed was more effective political control. A single Commander-in-Chief would naturally possess a position of far greater authority even in his own country than would a committee, while the influence of a foreign Government upon the Commander-in-Chief who commanded their troops would be very limited indeed. When to those who held these views was added the influence of those who looked with suspicion upon "unity of command" as constitutionally an unsound measure there were very strong forces arrayed on behalf of the compromise. So, as the crisis approached, the supreme direction of the military forces of the Allied and Associated Powers in the Western theatres of war was in the hands of a polyglot committee, each member of which was responsible to a separate Government, and immediately this committee set to work its clumsy machinery began to creak.

Then suddenly the blow came. On March 21 forty German divisions were flung against the fourteen divisions of the British Fifth Army, which was driven back. By March 25 there appeared to be great danger that the Germans would succeed in capturing Amiens and in separating the British from the French army. By that time almost the whole of the British reserves had been drawn into the fight, and Sir Douglas Haig did not feel that he was strong enough to ensure the safety both of Amiens and of the Channel ports, while General Pétain was

doubtful whether he could send Sir Douglas Haig sufficient troops to make Amiens safe and at the same time secure his own front and cover Paris.

It was a grim crisis, probably the most serious of all the many crises with which the Allies had been faced in the course of the war. It happened that at this time Lord Milner, the Secretary of State for War, and General Sir Henry Wilson, the new Chief of the Imperial General Staff, were in France, having gone there to report to the British Government and to concert with the French Government upon such measures as seemed best in the emergency. Sir Douglas Haig and his generals were naturally fully occupied with the military situation, and it was arranged for their convenience that a conference should be held on March 26 at the little town of Doullens. That conference was attended by M. Poincaré, the President of the French Republic, M. Clemenceau, the Prime Minister of France, M. Loucheur, the French Minister of Munitions, who represented the French Government, Lord Milner, who represented the British Government, Sir Douglas Haig and the four Army Commanders of the British army, Sir Henry Wilson, General Pétain, and General Foch.

When he was presenting the bâton of Marshal of France to General Foch M. Poincaré told us that a conversation held in the garden of the house at

Doullens in which the conference was held had convinced him that the bâton was coming to Foch. The Executive Council of generals had, as had been anticipated, proved to be too slow and cumbrous to deal with a real emergency, and already at this early stage it was in a state of suspended animation and had to be replaced promptly by something more adequate. In fact, the situation was so serious that immediate action had to be taken. There was no time to refer back to the Allied Governments for authority and approval, and in that day of stress common sense prevailed. Political difficulties vanished, and General Foch was given authority to co-ordinate the action of the Allied armies on the Western front.

Even then our Government was a little frightened of calling a spade a spade, and was at pains to explain that Foch had not been appointed Generalissimo; but both the soldiers and the public hailed the Doullens decision with such enthusiasm and with such complete disregard of the niceties of official terminology, that after some further discussion and some skilful and tactful handling of the position by M. Clemenceau, Foch, on April 14, was nominated Commander-in-Chief of the Allied armies in France and Belgium.

It has often been asked who was mainly responsible for the appointment of General Foch. There is no question but that Mr. Lloyd George

worked for "unity of command." The difficulty with him was that he did not understand fully the essential conditions of military command, and that for the sake of political considerations he was prepared to be content with something which fell short of military necessity. It is also certainly the case that the Government of the United States desired to achieve "unity of command," and that their influence was a most potent factor in bringing about the result which was eventually achieved. The conference at Doullens had been assembled in such haste that there was no time to obtain the presence of General Pershing, who was down in the south at Chaumont. Immediately General Pershing heard of the decision of the conference he wrote to General Foch his well-known letter of March 28 offering the new Generalissimo every man he had available. There never was any doubt but that the decision would be cordially welcomed and approved both by the statesmen and the generals of the United States, though in point of fact neither were represented when the decision was reached. This decision was probably mainly due to the influence at the conference of March 26 of M. Clemenceau, who had been quietly preparing the way for the appointment of a Generalissimo, Lord Milner and Sir Douglas Haig.

There were rumours flying about at the time that Sir Douglas Haig and the British generals looked

askance at the appointment of General Foch, but these were absolutely devoid of any foundation in fact. General Foch's appointment was welcomed immediately by both Sir Douglas Haig and his Army Commanders, and there has been no better example of loyal co-operation in war than that between Sir Douglas Haig and Marshal Foch.

But, when all is said and done, the man who brought about "unity of command" was Ludendorff. It was the emergency created by his great drive upon either side of the Somme which produced clear thinking and prompt decisions. Boswell once remarked to Dr. Johnson that few people allow themselves to think clearly about death, but that when a man is threatened with death he usually behaves with resolution. And so it was at Doullens on March 26. Ludendorff had dealt a deadly blow to the Allies, and under the menace of that blow the gentlemen assembled in the little town of Doullens concentrated their minds, behaved with resolution, and took what was probably the most momentous decision made during the course of the great war, while those who had been hesitating on the bank found when they had taken the plunge that the waters were not so cold as they looked.

I have spoken of Ludendorff as the controlling mind at German Headquarters. In the middle of the campaign of 1916 Falkenhayn, whose plans for the capture of Verdun had failed ignominiously, was

removed from his position as Chief of the Great General Staff, and Hindenburg, with Ludendorff as his first assistant, was brought over from the Russian front to succeed him at Great Headquarters. The pair had not been there very long before it became clear that Hindenburg was little more than a figure-head and Ludendorff was *de facto* chief of the German war organisation. Hindenburg had gained the deep gratitude of the Berliners by his great victory of Tannenburg, won at a time when they were trembling in their shoes at the Russian invasion of East Prussia. We built high hopes upon the Russian "steam roller," and during the first months of the war the German public regarded it as being as formidable as we did. They were never easy in their minds until the Russians were driven back, and when this result was achieved they contrasted Hindenburg's performances—with armies composed at first largely of second-rate troops—and the manner in which he restored the military efficiency of their feeble Austrian Ally, with the failure of their generals in the West, who, though they had the pick of the German army at their disposal, had not achieved victory.

Hindenburg's square head, his burly figure, his strong character, his contempt of the arts of peace, of which many stories were in circulation, made him an admirable embodiment of Prussian militarism, a living exponent of the gospel of might is right which

the German people had adopted with enthusiasm. He provided the Kaiser with just the personality needed at Great Headquarters to keep the war fever in the Fatherland at boiling point. Ludendorff, who did his work at the office desk and was first and foremost a military thinker, could never make the same appeal to the popular imagination as did his chief. The pair, therefore, made an excellent combination. The Germans have always been good at such combinations, at providing the strong personality or the royal personage with just the right brain. The classic example is that of Blücher and Gneisenau in the closing years of the Napoleonic wars. Blücher was then the personality, Gneisenau the brain. Both of them came to England for the fêtes which followed the peace of 1815, and it is told of Blücher that he then made a bet in a London drawing-room that he was the only man in the room who could kiss his own head. He won his wager by walking up to Gneisenau and giving him a smacking kiss on both cheeks. I doubt if Hindenburg were ever so frank as Blücher, but the relations between him and Ludendorff were very much those of their predecessors of one hundred years before.

By placing the supreme control of the Allied armies in the West in the hands of Foch, one of the essential preparations to meet the German menace was completed just in time to prevent disaster, but it was already too late to take those others which

might have saved us from such shocks as caused us to tremble for our safety. At the end of 1917 the man power of France, in the fourth year of the fierce struggle in which she had, until the summer of 1916, borne the brunt of the fighting, was approaching exhaustion, and the French Government was no longer able to keep up its forces on the Western front at full strength. The British army was wearied by the campaign in Flanders, and was grievously disappointed that the brilliant promise of the tank attack at Cambrai in November had ended in one more check. Both we and our French Allies had had to weaken materially our forces on the Western front in order to bring help to our friends in the Southern theatre of war. The collapse of Russia was definite and complete, and German divisions were streaming from the Eastern to the Western front. It had become a certainty that early in 1918 we should be confronted in France and Flanders by almost the full military power of Germany. The one bright spot in the picture was the arrival of the first American divisions in France, but there was little prospect that America would be able to solve the vast problem of creating armies and transporting them three thousand miles across the Atlantic in time to make her strength felt in France before the late summer. Prudence therefore demanded that we British should do everything that was possible to increase our forces there.

The Last Four Months

Allenby's victory at Gaza and Beersheba and his brilliant pursuit ending in the capture of Jerusalem had disorganised the Turkish army preparing near Aleppo under German leadership for the recapture of Baghdad, and had made our position in Asia secure. Two British divisions had been moved from Salonika, and a third, composed largely of Territorial battalions brought from India, had been created in Egypt, to reinforce Allenby for the campaign in which he broke through the Turkish lines on the southern frontier of Palestine. His artillery and aircraft had also been increased, and later a veteran Indian division had been moved from Mesopotamia to Egypt, while the Indian cavalry regiments which had been serving in France were also sent there. Allenby's force was, therefore, very considerably stronger than that which had for a long time protected Egypt by covering the routes across the Sinai desert. North of Jerusalem, in the hills of Judæa, it was much better placed than it had been opposite Gaza. On one flank lay the Mediterranean, on the other the Dead Sea, while east of the Dead Sea spread the desert, of which our Arab friends were daily gaining more effective control. In March, 1918, Allenby had under his command an army of three mounted divisions, one mounted brigade, and eight infantry divisions of an approximate strength of 170,000 men, of whom about 150,000 were white troops and 20,000 native troops. In India Sir

Charles Monro's expansion of the Indian army was well developed and a steady stream of Indian troops for service in Palestine was assured. We should, therefore, have incurred no risk whatever in the East by sending Haig at the beginning of 1918 a considerable reinforcement of white troops from Palestine. Not a man, however, was moved from the East to reinforce Haig until after the German blow had fallen and our armies had suffered the most serious reverse which befell us during the whole course of the war.

In January, 1918, the fighting strength of our army in France had been much diminished as a result of the prolonged fighting which had begun at the end of July, 1917, in the attack on the Flanders ridges, and had not ended till the German counter-attack at Cambrai had been checked, well on in November. Hardly a battalion, a battery, or a squadron had its full complement of men. This had been expected, and indeed it was a normal experience of the war on the Western front, for while great battles were in progress the losses exceeded the flow of drafts from home. The period during which hard fighting took place on the British front normally lasted from March to November, and consequently at the beginning of the year the fighting strength of the army was usually at its lowest. During the winter and early spring conditions of weather and of ground put a stop to operations on a grand scale, with the

result that the losses were comparatively small; this then was the time to bring the army up to strength in preparation for the campaign which might be expected in the spring. It was necessary that the preparations for filling the gaps in the ranks should be made a long time ahead, for it took from four to five months to train a recruit to take his place in the ranks in France, and the process of calling him up often took as long as from two to three months from the time he received his first notice. Therefore, arrangements for filling up the ranks during the early months of the year should have been well in hand by the previous summer.

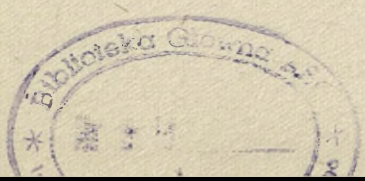
In December, 1916, the ranks of the fighting troops had been heavily depleted by the long and bitter struggles of the Somme and the Ancre, but by April, 1917, on the eve of the battle of Arras, the ranks were again full, and Haig had been provided with considerable additional reinforcements; in fact at that time the fighting strength of our army was almost at the highest point it ever reached. We then still had divisions at home which could be sent out to reinforce the army in France, and were able to bring back troops from Egypt, because by advancing into the Sinai desert and gaining control of the wells, which provided the only water available for a force advancing to attack Egypt, we could defend that country much more economically than if we held the long line of the Suez Canal.

What Went Before

In 1918 we had in England no divisions which could be sent to Haig, and it was therefore the more necessary, in view of the danger which threatened us and of the fact that five divisions had been sent from our army in France to Italy, to bring back to France every man who could be spared from the more distant theatres of war, and to make our ranks up to their full strength. Yet none of these measures was taken. In March, 1918, Sir Douglas Haig's fighting strength was weaker by over 42,000 men than it had been on January 1, 1917; there had been some increase in artillery and a considerable increase in aircraft, tanks and machine-guns, and a very large increase in labour formations, both British and coloured; but unarmed labourers and Chinese coolies were not the kind of reinforcements Sir Douglas Haig needed to fight Germans, though they were invaluable to him for other purposes. His deficiency of infantry—the essential arm, whether for offence or defence—was greater by more than 100,000 men than it had been at the beginning of 1917. A comparison of the strengths on the eve of the battle of March, 1918, with those in January, 1917, is, however, misleading, for it is a comparison of a period when the ranks ought to have been full with a period when they were naturally empty; the only fair comparison is between the position in March, 1918, and in March, 1917. On the latter date the rifle and sabre strength of the army in France

—that is, the number of men available for duty in the trenches—was greater by 180,000 men than it was at the former.

During the early months of 1918 the drafts sent out from home fell so far short of Sir Douglas Haig's requirements that it was impossible for him to maintain his army any longer at the strength at which it had been during the previous autumn. Accordingly, between the middle of January and the middle of February, three battalions out of the thirteen in each of the British divisions were broken up, and the men in them were used to take the place of drafts from home to fill up the ranks of the remaining battalions. This measure, which was the consequence of the failure of the Government to provide the drafts, caused a drastic change in the organisation and tactics of our infantry at a critical period when there was no time to accustom commanders and troops to the new conditions. Worse still, it advertised our weakness to the army, and was the reverse of encouraging to men who were preparing to meet a great attack. Nor was this all. Owing to the decline of the strength of the French army the French Government became more and more insistent that we should take over a longer stretch of the front. Pétain at this time thought it extremely probable that the German attack would be directed against him, and he did not feel himself able to meet such an attack unless we relieved some of his troops.



When the length of front held by us and by the French was compared it appeared at first sight that France was bearing a very undue share of the burden; but the burden borne by troops in trench warfare cannot be estimated merely by the length of the line they hold. The French, for example, held a very long line in Alsace and Lorraine, where for months on end a serious bombardment was almost unknown, and the trenches could be very lightly held, because the Germans on this front were not in strength and showed no disposition to attack. On the other hand, the enemy had always kept a large proportion of his troops in the West opposite the British front, while the climate and soil of Flanders made this, for many months in the year, one of the most exacting parts of the whole line. A still more important consideration was that only on a comparatively small part of the French front would loss of ground bring with it very serious consequences, while the British front north of the Somme covered so narrow a strip of country in front of the Channel ports that almost every yard of it was precious. However, after prolonged negotiations between the two Governments, and after the question had been referred to the new Versailles organisation for examination, the French arguments prevailed, and Haig, in order to meet the wishes of the British Government, agreed with Pétain to take over an additional twenty-eight miles of front and to extend

his front south of the Somme as far as the Oise. This extension made the length of our line 130 miles, the greatest length of front we had ever held, while the number of rifles available to hold it was approximately equal to that in March, 1916, when the length of our front was eighty miles and the Germans still had great armies on the Russian front.

The new front taken over from the French fell to our Fifth Army, which, though it was urgently in need of rest, had in the few weeks preceding the German attack to familiarise itself with fresh ground and to work incessantly at the erection of defences. Actually, then, our preparations for meeting the threat which the Germans held over us were that we had agreed with our Allies to invest the supreme command in the hands of an executive committee, we had abolished two of Haig's cavalry divisions, had reduced the number of infantry battalions at his disposal by close on 25 per cent., had made an important alteration in the organisation of our infantry, and had at the same time increased our liabilities by taking over twenty-eight miles of new front, this new front being not less important than our positions in Flanders, for it covered the roads to Amiens and Paris.

It will naturally be asked how it came about that we did not do more to prepare for the great German attack, which was expected long before it took place. Mr. Lloyd George was confirmed by the result of

the third battle of Ypres in his opinion that the position on the Western front was one of stalemate. We and the French had made attempt after attempt to break through the German trenches when our numerical superiority over the enemy had been greater than his was expected to be when he had brought his troops across from Russia. In April, 1917, on the eve of General Nivelle's offensive, it had been calculated that the Allies had on the Western front a superiority of 600,000 rifles and 5,000 guns. In the spring of 1918 it was estimated that the Germans might have a superiority of 300,000 rifles and that their preponderance in artillery would not be considerable. Mr. Lloyd George believed that the whole experience of the war on the Western front had shown that the Germans would require a far greater numerical superiority than they appeared likely to possess in order to endanger our position. He doubted if the Germans would make the attempt, but was quite certain that the Allied forces in France and Belgium were strong enough to stop them if they did. He believed that victory could only be won by taking the way round, by knocking down Germany's props. He had held this view from the early days of 1915, when the trench barrier was first established between the North Sea and the Swiss frontier. He had first advocated reinforcing Serbia with the object of attacking Austria and bringing in the other Balkan States

on our side. Then, when he failed to carry his arguments in favour of that enterprise, he had proposed to attack Austria through Italy. Both these operations were now out of the question; the Allied armies in these theatres could only be reinforced to the necessary extent at the expense of the Western front, and if he did not think it necessary to strengthen that front he was not rash enough to weaken it; but by leaving Allenby the troops he had in Palestine, and by reinforcing him from India, he believed that it would be possible to defeat Turkey, who was very shaky. Victories in Asia Minor would, he hoped, encourage the Allied peoples to hold on during 1918, while America was preparing her armies and shipping them to France, and it would be time enough to consider in 1919 whether it was worth while to defeat the German armies in the West. He had to provide labour for the munition factories, for the coal mines, and for the shipyards to meet the submarine menace. He could only obtain the soldiers needed to keep our troops in France up to strength by raising the age limit for the draft, and he dreaded the political effect of doing this if he left Ireland exempt, while the problem of forcing conscription on Ireland was one which he did not care to face. He considered that by instituting the Versailles Council and its later development, the Executive Military Committee of the Council, he had counterbalanced the advantage which the Germans had in the West in a single homogeneous

army under one commander, and he refused both to meet the demands of the soldiers for men to fill the depleted ranks in France and to transfer troops from Palestine to France. He was, in fact, sincerely convinced that the barrier in the West was impenetrable alike by us and by the Germans.

Though the procession of German troops from East to West had begun in November and continued steadily throughout the winter and spring, it was not until March that Ludendorff's fighting strength on the Western front was approximately equal numerically to that of the Allies. It is not possible, however, to estimate correctly the power of opposing armies merely by counting heads, and Ludendorff had many factors in his favour which added materially to his strength. For a long time before he opened the campaign of 1918 there had been little or no fighting on the Eastern front, which became for him a vast rest camp and training centre in which his men could be prepared for work elsewhere. Thus while our men and the enemy opposed to them were engaged in desperate and exhausting fighting, large German forces were quietly preparing elsewhere for their next effort. The collapse of Russia and the failure of the 1917 campaign to yield any decisive results had thrown us on the defensive, and had given Ludendorff the opportunity, of which he skilfully took full advantage, of playing upon the fears of the Allied commanders and of keeping each of them under

threat of attack. Further, in March, 1918, Ludendorff had large reserves of trained men still in the East, ready to come across. Actually between March and the end of May, when his strength was at its highest, his forces were increased by sixteen divisions and a large amount of heavy artillery. Therefore Ludendorff had an important reinforcement at hand in March, and the Allies had no corresponding reserve which could be ready until long after the German commander had his on the spot.

The extreme advocates of the policy of seeking victory by the way round failed from the first to recognise that the German forces on the Russian front were a potential reserve for their armies in France, and that at any time from the beginning of 1915 onwards the German leaders might have reversed the process which they carried through after their defeat in the first battle of Ypres, have stood on the defensive in the East and sent all troops not necessary for defence there to the West. Even before the U-boats, Gothas and Zeppelins became as dangerous as they subsequently were, it was clear that, if the Germans reached Calais and Boulogne, Great Britain would be in danger of starvation and of invasion, and that her army in France would have a very precarious line of communications with the Motherland.

The importance of protecting Paris needed no discussion. In September, 1914, Joffre, backed by the French Government, had made all possible pre-

parations for continuing the war even if the capital fell to the enemy, but the moral effect which the success of a second German attack on Paris might have had is incalculable, and the safety of Paris ought not in any circumstances to have been risked. It is an old and well-established maxim of strategy that before launching out upon an offensive enterprise a general must look to the safety of the vitals both of his army and of his country. The Channel ports and Paris were the vitals of Great Britain and of France.

The moment these were seriously threatened the Government perforce took in haste the measures which might have been carried through at leisure. The application of the Military Service Acts was extended, drafts were rushed out from home, and every British soldier who could be spared from the East was brought to France. Just as the Germans forced "unity of command" upon us, so they compelled us to discard the errors in our strategy. But it is now time for a word as to the events which brought these things to pass.

By the middle of February, 1918, it had become apparent that the Germans were pushing forward their preparations for a great offensive with all possible energy, and there were already indications that they intended to attack the British right, held by our Fifth and Third Armies. Ludendorff was, however, much too skilful to confine his preparations to one part of

the front, and these pointed to the possibility that the attack on our right might be a preliminary to a greater blow against our line farther north, or against the French to the south. The northern portion of our front was but fifty miles distant from Calais and sixty miles from Boulogne; therefore, in the north every yard of ground was of value to us, and if the Germans had broken through even to a depth of twenty-five miles we should have been in dire straits, for they would then have gained possession of the hill of Cassel which dominates the Flanders flats northwards to the coast on either side of Dunkerque, would have forced the Belgians to fall back, could have shelled and bombed the harbours, and have hemmed the Allied left flank into a position from which issue would have been wellnigh impossible. In the south we had more elbow room, for our front between St. Quentin and the Oise was over ninety miles from the coast, and could, in case of emergency, be more quickly reinforced by the French than could our line in Flanders.

Sir Douglas Haig, therefore, felt bound to keep the greater part of such reserves as he had at his disposal, north of the Somme. Gough's Fifth Army held the line from our point of junction with the French on the Oise not far from La Fère to Gouzeaucourt, south-west of Cambrai, a distance of about forty-two miles. On the whole of this front Gough had fourteen divisions and three cavalry divisions,

eleven of his divisions being in the line, and the remainder in reserve, each of his divisions in the line holding on an average 6,750 yards of front. Byng's Third Army on Gough's left held a front of about twenty-seven miles with fifteen divisions, eight of them being in the line and seven in reserve, the average length of front held by each division being about 4,700 yards. Gough's liabilities, therefore, were very considerably greater than Byng's, and the reserves of the Fifth Army were much weaker than those of the Third, while, as it turned out, Gough had to bear by far the greater weight of the German attack.

Throughout the winter Ludendorff had been planning, with the method and care of a trained German mind, how to achieve his object and to solve the problem of breaking through the trench barrier, a problem to which all the generals on the West, on both sides, had hitherto found no answer. All were by this time agreed that the method of attack by means of a great and protracted bombardment, followed by an infantry assault pressed through upon one part of the front, was a failure. The immense and lengthy preparation which this form of battle involved made any surprise impossible, as sooner or later the defender's reserves came up, and the battle ended in a slogging match in which the assailant gained little return for very heavy losses. Ludendorff probably realised that it would be out of the question

to keep all his preparations for attack secret. No camouflage could altogether conceal from our air observers that something was afoot, and some information would certainly have been elicited from the prisoners taken in the daily skirmishes of trench warfare. But he conceived that it would be possible to deceive us as to the weight of the blow which he meant to deliver, and to achieve some measure of surprise by keeping the great part of his artillery and the bulk of his attacking divisions at a distance from the battlefield until the last possible moment. This method had the double advantage of keeping us in uncertainty both as to the strength of the attack and as to whether it would be made in more than one place, for, in the weeks preceding the battle, he placed his reserves so that they could be moved as readily against our northern front, or even against the French front, as against our right flank.

He decided, then, to have no long preliminary bombardment, which would have given us a definite indication of his plans, and, as we had found to our cost, would so destroy the surface of the ground and break up the roads and the railways, as to make it a matter of great difficulty to get the reserves forward when they were needed. He also decided to bring up his attacking divisions at the last moment by train and by rapid marches under cover of darkness. This was the essence of his plan and the feature in which it differed most from other attacks which had been tried

in the West. In the details of its execution there was also much that was new. Ludendorff and his staff had studied very carefully all the previous attacks which had been carried through both by us and by the French, and he found that opportunities had often been missed because parts of the attacking line had been checked at strong points held resolutely by the defenders, and the remainder had waited for these to be reduced; he also maintained that the progress of the Allied infantry had been delayed by too frequent reliefs. He therefore determined that as a principle he would follow up success wherever it was won, driving in at such weak points as he discovered, and that he would not delay his advance in order to overcome centres of resistance against which his progress was checked. In order to develop this method of attack to the utmost he devoted the winter to selecting from his army the best and bravest of his soldiers and putting them through a special form of training. These men, whom he called "storm troops," were to lead his attacks, with orders to press forward as far and as fast as possible, while they were given the assurance that where they were successful they would be immediately supported by the reserve. He impressed upon his infantry divisions that they must go forward to the utmost powers of their endurance without expecting relief, and practised them in making long advances, carrying food for several days.

By March 19 Haig's Intelligence Department had discovered that the German preparations for attack on the Third and Fifth Armies were nearly complete, and it was anticipated that the battle would begin on March 20 or 21. The attack actually opened shortly before 5 A.M. on the 21st with a bombardment of the greatest intensity against the whole front held by those armies, while in order to keep us in doubt till the last possible moment as to their intentions, the Germans simultaneously bombarded parts of our northern line and the French fronts on either side of Reims. For about five hours a perfect hurricane of shell was hurled against Gough's and Byng's defences, and it has been stated by German officers that the rate of fire was so rapid that many of their guns became red hot. Then, shortly before 10 A.M., the German infantry advanced. This five-hour bombardment may be compared to our artillery preparation for the first battle of the Somme, which lasted seven days. The battle had not been long in progress before it became clear that Ludendorff was throwing his whole weight against our right, and, therefore, though Haig had guessed accurately both the time and the place at which the attack would be made, Ludendorff had won the first move by getting all his reserves in motion first. This much was due to his skill, but he was also greatly favoured by fortune. The early months of 1918 had been phenomenally dry, but March 19 had been a day of drizzle sufficient to

damp the surface of the hard ground; on the 20th the sky had cleared and the sun had drawn up a dense blanket of fog which, on the 21st, enveloped the whole battlefield, with the result that in few places was it possible to see more than fifty yards. We often during the war created artificial fogs and blanketed successfully the enemy's deadly machine-guns by means of smoke clouds, the preparation of which had cost us much time and trouble. Ludendorff was provided by Nature with a more effective screen than we had ever been able to produce.

Our system of defence was an adaptation of that which had been used by the Germans with considerable success in the third battle of Ypres; that is to say, it consisted, in the first place, of an outpost zone covering the area which, as experience told us, would probably be most heavily bombarded by the enemy. This outpost zone was lightly held, and the troops in it were intended, after giving warning of the German advance and delaying it to the best of their power, to fall back on the battle positions behind. The strength of these battle positions depended greatly upon the cross fire of guns and machine-guns, and upon a series of elaborate strong posts so placed that the garrison of each could see under normal conditions both the enemy, at whom they were to fire, and the neighbours with whom they were to co-operate. This system, which later more than justified itself when there was no fog, was unsuitable when guns, machine-

guns and infantry were blinded. The only answer to the fog was to strengthen the infantry holding the trenches, but for this there were not men available unless they were taken from the already weak reserve.

Nor was the fog the only stroke of fortune which favoured the Germans. Gough's front ran roughly north and south till it reached the River Oise, and then bent back south-eastwards along the northern bank of the river. In this portion of its course the Oise runs through a wide and normally marshy valley, such as no great attacking force could cross in an ordinary spring. It had, therefore, not been expected that the German attack would include this sector, which was lightly held. In fact, one of the arguments which the French had put forward in order to induce us to extend our front so far south was that no large number of troops would be required to defend the Oise, where our line would be so strong naturally as to be impervious to attack. The Oise line had always been regarded as a quiet sector. Being very short of troops, Gough had decided to hold this, apparently the least vulnerable part of his front, with a series of posts, and not to have a continuous line of defence. The dry weather, however, enabled the Germans to cross the marshes without difficulty, while the fog allowed them to penetrate between the posts, often unobserved. The result of this was that the enemy were able to get behind our defences further north and cut off the defenders.

What Went Before

It is not my purpose to describe the struggle in detail. My object is to make clear the causes which led to the defeat of the Fifth Army and to show that they were beyond the control of the brave men of whom that army was composed. From the first day of the battle Ludendorff flung sixty-four divisions against the Third and Fifth Armies. Of these sixty-four at least forty attacked the fourteen divisions and three cavalry divisions of Gough's Fifth Army, while the remaining twenty-four fell upon Byng's fifteen divisions. It is, therefore, in no way surprising that the Fifth Army was overwhelmed.

The news that it had been overwhelmed came as a rude shock to the public at home. It seemed inconceivable that the Germans should have been able to break so completely through such elaborate defences, manned by British troops, when we had, despite lavish supplies of guns and munitions and the incomparable valour of our men, only been able by continuous effort and at an appalling cost to achieve much smaller results. Wild stories were flying about of the breakdown of the Fifth Army, and it was whispered in the drawing-rooms of London that the men had not fought as they ought to have fought. In the confusion and uncertainty of retreat the true facts could not be discovered and made known, with the result that for long imputations rested upon the Fifth Army which were wholly contrary to the truth. Eager to find some silver lining to the cloud, the

public fastened upon the glorious defence of the Third Army and contrasted it with Gough's apparent collapse.

I have no desire to minimise in any way the splendour of the achievement of Byng's men, but I trust I have made it clear that the burden which Gough's troops had to bear was incomparably the greater. In the first stage of the battle very nearly twice as many German divisions attacked Gough as fell upon Byng. Each of Gough's divisions had on the average to hold nearly 50 per cent. more front than had Byng, while the Third Army reserves were nearly twice as strong as those of the Fifth, yet at the end of the first day's battle Gough's left, where the gallant 9th Division beat off all attacks, had given less ground than some of Byng's divisions further north had been compelled to yield.

By the evening of March 21 our battle positions had not been penetrated except on the extreme right, where the Germans had crossed the dried-up bed of the Oise, but during the night and the next morning the enemy, helped by the fog, had discovered three weak points in our front, and, true to Ludendorff's principle, had pressed his advantage at these points till the line crumbled. These were days of gallant and desperate fighting against overwhelming odds, passing all preconceived standards of endurance and of self-sacrifice. The garrisons of many of our works held out long after the enemy, pouring through gaps

in our line, had swept beyond them and completely cut them off. As in the days of the crisis of the first battle of Ypres, cooks, signallers, servants and odd-job men of all kinds rallied round the headquarters of battalions and fought on long after hope of support had gone. The Germans, surging past these devoted bands, which stood out here and there along the front like rocks surrounded by the incoming tide, pressed back Gough's right, and, as by the evening of the 22nd, he had thrown in all his available reserves, and only one French division had as yet arrived to help him, he felt that there was no alternative but to fall back to the Somme.

A bridgehead position had been prepared around Péronne on the east bank of the river, but there had been no time to complete the defences along the river itself. When the troops arrived in their new positions, to which they withdrew during the night, hard pressed by the enemy, they found only some rudiments of trenches with little or no wire in front of them. Many strange and baseless reports were circulated to account for this fact. It was said that Gough, being a cavalry general, had refused to allow his rear lines of defence to be wired, and had even ordered wire to be pulled up in order that the cavalry might have free scope. The fact is that the southern portion of Gough's front had only been taken over from the French about seven weeks before the German attack began. During the early

part of the winter the French had been able to hold this portion of the front very lightly, so that the troops they had there were not sufficiently numerous to maintain even the existing defences in good condition, and they had made no attempt to construct the new works necessary to withstand a great German attack. The country had been devastated by the battles of 1916, the roads were in bad condition, there was no light railway system, the broad gauge system was defective, and, as all the villages had been gutted, there was no shelter for the troops. An immense amount of work had, therefore, to be done by the Fifth Army, the men labouring incessantly at the construction of defences in the battle zone and at improving the defective communications. The sole reason why the line of the Somme was not fortified was that there had been neither time nor labour available for the purpose. Gough had early realised that it was very probable that he would not have the time he needed to complete his rear lines of defence, and in February had asked our Intelligence Department to use every device at their disposal to cause the Germans to delay their attack.

Owing to the difficulty of carrying out a uniform retreat to the Somme of the whole line in the dark a gap occurred in our front in the neighbourhood of Ham, and Germans succeeded in getting across the river at that place. Although very elaborate preparations had been made for blowing up the Somme

bridges, and the men and explosives for this work were on the spot, yet the enemy's artillery, following up our retreat closely, in a number of cases exploded the charges prematurely, and in others cut the leads and so prevented the complete destruction of the bridges. The Somme, like the Oise, was, in consequence of the abnormally dry winter, very low, and the enemy was able to cross at many places where in ordinary times the river would have been impassable. The result of this combination of untoward events was that by the night of March 23 the line of the Somme was already in the hands of the Germans on Gough's right, and the defence of the river further north was seriously compromised.

Meanwhile, the enemy had been pressing Gough's left, while it was falling back north of the Somme in conformity with the retreat of the centre of the Fifth Army behind the river, and the situation at the junction of the Third and Fifth Armies became critical. The Third Army, which, during the 23rd, had repulsed repeated attacks by the enemy in mass formation and had given very little ground, was consequently compelled to swing back its right across the Somme battlefields. During the 22nd the Germans extended their gains west of the Somme against Gough's right, and on his left had seized the heights north of the river and west of Péronne. Both flanks of the defenders of the river line at and south of Péronne were thus endangered,

and there was no help for it but to fall back again.

The loss of the line of the Somme was a very serious matter, for the Germans now entered upon the zone in which were placed our depôts, stores and hospitals. These had all to be abandoned or evacuated hastily, and consequently great quantities of war material of all kinds fell into the enemy's hands; much suffering was caused to the sick and wounded, of whom numbers had to be left untended and without shelter alongside the railway lines in the rear until the hospital trains could pick them up; the telegraph and telephone communications were disorganised, and the difficulties of organising defence increased as the danger grew. It was clear that the main object of the Germans was to reach Amiens and that the weight of their attack was falling upon the Fifth Army. So, in order to allow Gough to devote his whole attention to the enemy advancing south of the river, Sir Douglas Haig placed that portion of the Fifth Army which was north of the Somme under Byng, and it then became a part of the Third Army. This new right of the Third Army was pressed back north of the Somme, and the Fifth Army south of the river, finding its flank exposed, had to continue its retreat. It was now the sixth day of the battle, March 26. The danger of the Germans reaching Amiens and driving in a wedge between the British and French armies was very nigh. Haig had ordered his last

reserves to the point of danger, and it was doubtful whether Pétain would be able to send the French reserves to the battlefield in time. It was, as I have said, in this emergency that the conference at Doullens appointed Foch to the supreme command, and by so doing inspired the weary leaders and their men, battling against great odds, with fresh confidence. Already, though they did not yet know it, the valour and endurance in adversity of our men was being rewarded, for the Germans, equally weary, could not sustain the momentum of their attack. Our airmen, who watched the long-drawn-out struggle from above, have described how, in its last stages, the infantry upon both sides were too exhausted to move, save at a slow walk, and would lie for hours opposite to each other without firing, having lost the energy to load and fire, save in a real emergency. Ludendorff had, as I have said, planned to get the last ounce out of his men, and in order to avoid loss of time in reliefs had left them to fight on until sheer exhaustion made them almost impotent. He had hoped that before that stage of exhaustion was reached he would have driven a wide breach in our line, but he had not reckoned with the doggedness of the British infantryman, whose spirit kept him fighting long after he ought to have collapsed. The line, though badly bent, was still a line, held by battalions reduced to the size of companies, brigades to the strength of weak battalions, but still held.

This was the state of affairs while Ludendorff was trying to get up fresh troops to the front and Foch was hurrying up the French reserves from the south to our aid, and it was then that an improvisation of Gough's gave just the time needed for our Allies to come up. He directed General Grant, his Chief Engineer, to assemble every man he could collect from his training schools, his engineers and the odds and ends of troops employed in special jobs behind the army, and form them into a reinforcing force. Later, as the Chief Engineer was required for his proper duties, the command of this miscellaneous body was given to General Carey, who happened to be free, and it became known to fame as Carey's Force. It was joined by Canadian and American railway construction engineers, who were engaged in laying railway lines in the neighbourhood of Amiens. These men, though but few of them had had any real military training, volunteered to fight, as had the American railway engineers who had fought with Byng's men when the Germans made their counter-attack at Cambrai in November, 1917, and were the first American soldiers to take part in battle on the Western front. With this exception this little band of Carey's consisted almost wholly of men included in the fighting strength of the Army, but, being hastily brought together, they lacked the equipment of an organised force. Nevertheless, this reinforcement, together with the skill and devotion

of our cavalry, who, on our right, repeated in even more trying circumstances their achievements during the retreat from Mons, and with the aid of divisions brought up to Amiens from Gough's extreme right as they were relieved by the French, just enabled the battered remnant of the Fifth Army to bar the direct road to Amiens until the arrival of the Australians from the north and of the French troops from the south once more established a firm barrier against the tide of the German invasion. By the evening of March 28 the worst of the crisis was over, though the great battle was by no means ended.

On that day the Germans made a desperate effort to drive in at Arras, an effort designed to force us out of the Vimy Ridge, one of the main pivots of our defence. This attack, which involved the right of Horne's First Army as well as the left and centre of Byng's Third Army, was delivered by the enemy in great strength, but it failed disastrously. When it ended, the Germans had gained a portion only of our outpost positions, and our battle positions had everywhere resisted their assaults. This time there was no fog to help the enemy, and Haig's system of defence was completely successful. It is not too much to say that this costly repulse doomed Ludendorff's campaign to failure.

We have the evidence of captured documents and of Ludendorff's statements in his "Reminiscences" that the chief object of this campaign was to separate

the British from the French army, the capture of Amiens being only a means towards that end. The danger of the Germans realising this plan would have been much greater than it actually was had they managed, as Ludendorff intended, to make a wide breach north of the Somme, for they would then have used that river between Péronne and Abbeville to hold off the French reinforcements coming up from the south, while they attempted to drive the British army into the sea, and, of course, the farther north the breach the longer it would take the French troops to reach the danger point. When one recalls how very near the Germans were to creating a real breach south of the Somme and how the French reserves came up only just in time to prevent such a calamity, there is little difficulty in imagining how much greater the peril would have been had the Third Army given way, and in appreciating the wisdom of Sir Douglas Haig's decision to keep the greater part of his very limited reserve north of the Somme. I believe it was the stout resistance of the Third Army upon March 23 and the retirement of the Fifth Army behind the Somme upon that day which induced Ludendorff to follow what he believed to be the line of least resistance, and to strike for Amiens by the southern bank of the Somme. Then when he found that he could not overcome the resistance of the Fifth Army before the French came up, and realised that he would have to call a halt on the southern part of

the battlefield to rest and relieve his exhausted men, he made the desperate attempt of March 28 to return to his first idea of creating such a breach north of the Somme as would enable him to roll up our line and force us back on the ports. From this second danger Byng's Third Army saved us. Checked on the northern battle-front, Ludendorff, on April 4, made one more attempt to reach Amiens by the southern route in a battle which lasted till the evening of the 5th; but Foch's vigorous methods had already brought up sufficient French troops, and again our cavalry covered themselves with glory, while four Australian brigades had strengthened our front south of the Somme, so that the great German effort to drive a wedge between the Allied armies wore itself out.

Hardly had one crisis passed before another arose. On April 9 the Germans attacked and overwhelmed the Portuguese holding a portion of the Flanders front to the south of Armentières. Haig had greatly weakened his forces in the north in order to find troops to save Amiens, and the divisions sent to the Somme had to some extent been replaced in Flanders by exhausted divisions withdrawn from that battlefield and hastily reconstituted with reinforcements sent out from England. Thus our men passed from one fiery trial to another. This Flanders battle had been considered and rejected by Ludendorff when he formed his original plan, but, finding that his troops on the

Amiens front were checked and that his Seventeenth Army, which had attacked Byng and Horne, had been so severely handled as to be incapable, for a time, of further effort, he determined to revert to it and to drive for the Channel ports.

By the evening of April 9 the Germans had forced their way across the River Lawe, midway between Armentières and Béthune, and had made such progress as to endanger our hold upon both towns. Béthune was saved by the splendid defence of the 55th West Lancashire Division of its front about Festubert and Givenchy. Sir Douglas Haig mentions as one of the many gallant deeds performed by this division the story of a machine-gun which was kept in action, although the Germans had entered the rear compartment of the " pill-box " from which it was firing, the gun team holding up the enemy by revolver fire from the inner compartment. Not many months before this same division, under the same commander, Sir H. Jeudwine, had given way before the German counter-attack at Cambrai, when weary, weak in numbers, and holding a very extended front. It had then been subjected to a great deal of ill-founded criticism, but in this battle it sent a proud answer to its critics and told them that the simple process of judging by results, which has so often been commended, is rarely applicable in war, and that the popular cry for victims when things are not going well is wrong in nine cases out of ten.

At the other end of the break the enemy made more progress, and despite the stout resistance of the 9th Division on the Messines Ridge, worked his way to the north and south of Armentières, at the same time deluging the town with gas shell to an extent which made life in it impossible. It was therefore abandoned on the 10th, while the next day Merville fell. The Germans now began a dangerous movement towards Hazebrouck, the central railway junction of Flanders, and on the 12th it was as near capture as Amiens had been during the crisis of the March battle. So serious was the position that extensive preparations were made for flooding the approaches to Dunkerque and Calais and for sending back to England from those ports all personnel not immediately needed for their working; while, in order to shorten his fronts and to get reserves to meet this new German rush for Calais, Haig, with a sad heart, ordered a withdrawal from the Flanders ridges, which had been won at such cost in the previous autumn, to a line just covering Ypres. But once again British troops, never so brilliant as in a defensive battle against great odds, surpassed all expectation. On the 13th the remnants of the 29th and 31st Divisions, strung out on a very wide front, contested every foot of ground with bullet and bayonet, and beat off a succession of fierce attacks from early morning until late afternoon, so gaining time for the 1st Australian Division, railed up from the Somme, to detrain at

Hazebrouck, come forward and help to save that town.

The most pressing danger was then averted; but the Germans, though foiled in their attempt to open a direct way to Calais and Boulogne, still fought fiercely to extend their gains. On the 15th the arrival of reinforcements enabled them to capture Bailleul, and the strain upon the British army had become all but insupportable. Two-thirds of the divisions engaged in the Flanders battle had been through the fiery trial of the Somme. As fast as they were withdrawn from the first battle their ranks were refilled with the drafts from home, which were composed mainly of boys of nineteen and under, and they were sent north. It was these splendid youths, many of whom went into the maelstrom of battle within a few days of landing in France, with little opportunity of getting to know their leaders or of accustoming themselves to strange and terrible conditions, who saved the Channel ports. But Haig could not go on indefinitely reconstituting his shattered divisions and sending them back into battle, and he was very near the end of his resources. By the middle of April, however, French troops had come to our aid, and with their help repeated attacks by the Germans in the neighbourhood of Kemmel on the 16th and 17th were repulsed, and thereafter for a time the battle in Flanders died down.

The interest then shifted to the southern battle-

field, where on April 24 the Germans made a last attempt to break through to Amiens, and for a time were in possession of Villers-Brettonneux. This was one of the few attacks made by the Germans in which they used tanks with success, and it was their tanks which cleared a way into the village for the German infantry. The situation was highly critical, for Rawlinson, who had assumed command on the Amiens front on March 28, was very weak, Haig having called upon him for every man he could spare to nourish the battle in Flanders, while if the Germans had managed to establish themselves a very short distance to the west of Villers-Brettonneux they would have been able to look down upon Amiens. It was no time for hesitation, and a brilliant counter-attack made on the night of the 24th, before the Germans had time to establish themselves in their newly-won positions, saved us in yet another crisis. In this counter-attack, which was made by troops of the 4th and 5th Australian Divisions, by a mixed brigade made up from the 18th and 58th Divisions, and by part of the 8th Division, which had been holding the village and its neighbourhood, Villers-Brettonneux was recaptured and the gate to Amiens was securely locked.

Two days later the battle broke out again in Flanders, and on April 25 the enemy, reinforcing his troops on the Kemmel front with five fresh divisions, succeeded in breaking in on either side of Kemmel

Hill, which was at the time held by the French, and in cutting off the garrison. This was a very serious blow, for in Kemmel Hill the enemy obtained a grand observatory, from the top of which he could overlook all our lines as far north as Ypres and could watch all the roads and railways leading thither from as far west as Poperinghe. Therefore a further withdrawal of our front in the salient became necessary. In the result, however, the gain of Kemmel proved to be the enemy's undoing, for it encouraged him to make a great attack on April 29, which extended from near Bailleul to the north of Ypres. The German infantry came on in massed formation with bayonets fixed, and were completely repulsed by our troops and by the French and Belgians on our flanks. On our front, between Kemmel and Ypres, the enemy's repeated and heavy assaults were all beaten back by the 21st, 49th and 25th Divisions, which, except at one point to the south of Ypres, yielded not a yard of ground. This failure was hardly less important in its effect on the campaign than that which the Germans had suffered on March 28, and, as will be seen, these two triumphs of our defence over the enemy's attack went far in preparation for the victories which came later in the year. On April 30 the battle came to a close with the recapture of the village of Locre, on the Bailleul-Ypres road, to the west of Kemmel, by our French Allies.

In rather less than six weeks the Germans had

flung no fewer than one hundred and forty-one divisions against the combined British and French forces. Fifty-five infantry divisions and three cavalry divisions of Haig's army had stayed the attacks of one hundred and nine German divisions. The third German campaign of conquest in the West had been defeated by the grit and endurance of the British soldier, and by the timely appointment of Foch to the supreme command, but at a terrible cost. Our casualties amounted to more than 300,000 killed, wounded and missing—that is, very nearly double our losses in the eight and a half months of the Dardanelles campaign, and over 70,000 more than our losses in the three and a half months of the third battle of Ypres. In that battle we had captured 24,600 prisoners and 64 guns, and we had gained possession of the Flanders ridges. At the end of the battles of March and April we stood " with our backs to the wall," we had lost 70,000 prisoners, 1,000 guns, 4,000 machine-guns, 700 trench mortars, 200 tanks, and an immense quantity of stores.* The worst result of the strain which had been thrown upon our army was that eight of our divisions had, in consequence of our heavy losses and of our lack of means to replace them promptly, to be reduced to skeletons, and were for a considerable period unable

* The figures of losses of material are those given by the Ministry of Munitions, and represent the replacements necessary after the battles. The actual captures by the Germans were somewhat smaller.

to fight even defensively in the line, while the Portuguese contingent had disappeared as a fighting force.

Such was the price which we had to pay for our failure to prepare adequately for a menace which had long been foreseen. Had the Government taken in time the measures which it had been urged to take, the reduction of two cavalry divisions and of more than one hundred infantry battalions might have been avoided, and both Gough and Byng might have had sufficient men to have enabled them to hold their battle positions against all attacks, while Haig's reserve might have been increased by at least two divisions. Our men had shown coolness, courage, determination and endurance in adversity which pass all understanding and are beyond all praise, but they should never and need never have been called upon for such sacrifices as they made without stint and without complaint.

CHAPTER II

FOCH *VERSUS* LUDENDORFF

Foch on the Defensive—Breaking the Barrier in the West—The Rival Methods

FOCH made his name before the war as a military thinker. First as a professor and then as chief of the French War College, he acquired a European reputation, and to have been a student under him was regarded as a special distinction by the officers of the French staff during the war. While at the War College he published two books which were regarded by the military world as the most inspiring and thoughtful studies of war which had appeared since Clausewitz produced his great work. It was these books which caused Lord Roberts to predict, some ten years before Germany threw down the gauntlet, that when the great European struggle, for which he was urging Great Britain to prepare, came, the world would hear of Foch, who was then unknown outside professional circles. This reputation of Foch's had been built up by writing and by study. It was the reputation of a theorist, and since war is a very practical business, even the greatest of theorists is regarded more or less with suspicion until he has proved himself in practice. There were many in the

French army before the war who looked upon Foch as a bookman. It was the way in which he covered the withdrawal of the French army from Lorraine, when Joffre's first offensive failed, and above all his brilliant blow delivered on September 9, 1914, near the marshes of St. Gond, in the first battle of the Marne, which showed the world that Foch was as good at practice as at theory.

Great as were these early achievements, I doubt if anything shows Foch's mastery of his craft more clearly than his handling of the situation in the days which followed his appointment to the supreme command. The fate of the world hung in the balance, and there was no time for hesitation or delay. The new Generalissimo had to form a headquarters rapidly, and to organise in the midst of a great battle the machinery necessary for the command of five million men extended over a front of four hundred and fifty miles, tasks which, in the circumstances, would have taxed the capacity of any ordinary man. Not only did he do this, but he had not been in the saddle many hours before he made his personality felt. The success of Ludendorff's attempt to separate the British from the French army and to capture the great railway junction of Amiens depended almost entirely upon the progress he made before the French reserves from the south reached the battlefield. The French staff had worked out the movements of troops towards Amiens with their usual care and precision.

A systematic flow of divisions to the point of danger had been arranged for, but Foch wanted a flood, not a flow.

It has often been objected that the tendency of war schools is towards pedantry, that their students are inclined to be too much tied to the methods which they have learned during their course of study; and it might have been expected that Foch, who represented the essence of the teaching of the modern war colleges, would have been predisposed in favour of staff routine, but he fairly astounded the experts by his methods. It is the sign of the master that he makes system his servant, that he has the technique of his profession under his control, that he knows when to put rules aside and when to follow them. In that first week which followed the fateful meeting at Doullens of March 26, when he was given supreme control, Foch tore up all staff time-tables and by any and every means, orthodox and unorthodox, rushed troops to the point of danger. They were brought up by train, by marches, in motor-lorries, in 'buses; with or without transport, with or without their proper complement of supplies and ammunition. The point was to get to the battlefield men who could fight; details of organisation could be straightened out afterwards. So by inspiring those under him with his own fierce energy, Foch in the first ten days of his tenure of command brought to the battle nearly twice as many troops as had been estimated for by the French

staff, and by so doing built up a barrier against which the waves of German troops beat in vain.

I saw Foch at the beginning of April, when he had been in control about a week, at his temporary headquarters in the town hall of Beauvais, and thus early he was satisfied that he had the situation in hand. Despite the immense burden and responsibility on his shoulders, he was perfectly confident and cheerful. He leaned back in his chair smoking his inevitable cigar and looking at the great map on the wall opposite on which each day's progress of the German offensive was marked in colour; he pointed out how that progress was steadily diminishing, how the marks on the map grew closer together, just as do the circles made by a stone thrown into a pond before the last ripple disappears. "I am still fighting," he said, "and I have first to stabilise the front of battle. Ludendorff will probably try again, but he won't get through. In a few days more I shall have his progress permanently blocked." The day after I left Beauvais, on April 4, Ludendorff, sure enough, did make another great effort, but it ended in disaster for the Germans, and the front was stabilised.

I saw Foch again just a fortnight later, on April 16, at the height of the second crisis of the spring of 1918, when the Germans were on the outskirts of Hazebrouck, and appeared to be well on the road to Calais and Boulogne. Foch had then moved his headquarters to a small château behind

Amiens, and the organisation of his staff was more or less complete. Despite this second shock and the exhaustion of the British army, Foch had not lost one bit of his confidence. There were many criticisms in England at this time that he was leaving our army without support, and that the French should take a greater share in bearing the burden of meeting the great German offensive. But Foch had himself measured accurately both the German strength and the endurance of the British army, of which he had ample experience during the first battle of Ypres, when he helped us to stop the first German rush to Calais. It is the experience of every commander on the defensive in battle to receive urgent appeals for reinforcements from his hard-pressed front. His quality as a general is tested by his ability to appreciate these appeals at their proper value, to know when and in what strength to send help from his precious reserves and when to disregard the appeal altogether. His chance of winning the battle depends upon his having reserves to use at the right time and place, and if they are weakened too soon all hope of victory is gone.

On April 16 the situation still looked doubtful on our front in Flanders; but Foch thought otherwise. "The battle in Flanders is practically over," he said; "Haig will not need any more troops from me." Not even the loss of Kemmel a few days later ruffled him. He was right, and the battle in

Flanders ended in a complete repulse of the second German effort to break through.

Foch used to impress upon his students the supreme importance in war of the will and spirit of the Commander-in-Chief. The commander, he said, is the sword of his army. The general who refuses to admit the possibility of defeat can compel victory; a general who thinks he may be beaten is halfway on the road to defeat. In those dark days of the spring of 1918 Foch did not fail to put these principles of his into practice, and it was his courage and resolution which laid the foundation of victory. He was nobly supported by Sir Douglas Haig, whose calm, unruffled temperament enabled him to stand the appalling strain which began when his right crumbled on March 21 and continued until June, when the arrival of British reinforcements from the East and the steady growth of the American army allowed him to breathe more freely. But for Foch an even more severe trial was coming. He believed that the most dangerous course which Ludendorff could take, and therefore the most probable one, was to continue the attempt to separate the British from the French army, and he accordingly took measures to meet such an attack by the Germans.

There was at this time much talk of Foch's "army of manœuvre," but it never existed, save in the imagination of those critics who had got hold of the term from a superficial study of Napoleon's

strategy. Foch had all he could do to stop the holes which Ludendorff was making in the Allied front by sending divisions to reinforce the armies which were being pressed back. In order to have fresh divisions ready for this purpose he had to place in the line other divisions which had been sorely battered in battle and filled up with recruits whose training had been cut short. As soon as the battle in Flanders was ended Foch arranged with Haig to send down to the Chemin des Dames, on the Aisne front, five British divisions, of which four had fought the Germans both in the March battle on the Somme and in the April battle in Flanders, and the fifth had been heavily engaged in the former battle. The Chemin des Dames ridge was looked upon as a position of great strength, and Foch did not think it likely that the Germans would attack it. He therefore withdrew from it a number of fresh French divisions, which he placed in reserve ready to meet the attack which he expected Ludendorff to renew upon Amiens, and replaced them with tired French and British divisions.

While the Bavarian Crown Prince Rupprecht had been endeavouring to force his way to the Channel ports, the German Crown Prince had been resting his troops which had taken part in the Somme battle, and he had a great number of divisions in reserve down the valley of the Oise. These divisions were so placed that, while they threatened an attack upon Amiens, they could be moved just as quickly against

the Chemin des Dames. Ludendorff was, in fact, playing again the game he had played in March, and on May 27 he surprised the French and British troops on the Chemin des Dames by much the same methods as he had used against the British Third and Fifth Armies. Again the boys, of whom the British divisions were in great part composed, covered themselves with glory on the right of the battle front, and saved Reims by their tenacity in ten days of battle which took the place of the rest they had been promised; but the Allied centre was overwhelmed, and the German Crown Prince drove straight through to the Marne, where his further progress was just checked in time by the arrival at Château-Thierry of American troops. This German drive brought the enemy within forty miles of Paris, and was a heavy blow both to Foch and to the French people. Simultaneously with the Crown Prince's attack, "Big Bertha" began bombarding Paris, and a number of air raids were made upon the French capital, from which an exodus began very similar to that which had taken place in 1914 before the first battle of the Marne.

Foch was now in the most trying position in which a Commander-in-Chief can be placed in war. The enemy had deceived him and the capital of his country was in danger. Soldiers know that the general who makes no mistakes in war achieves nothing, and they understand how difficult it is for

a commander who has been forced to stand on the defensive to divine what the enemy may do next; but the statesmen and general public of democratic countries very rarely appreciate the difficulties and limitations of defence, and the general who has failed to foresee and provide for an emergency is usually looked at askance by them. Therefore, in any circumstances the position of a Commander-in-Chief whose troops have been worsted in battle is not enviable, but his troubles and responsibilities are increased tenfold when he is in command not only of troops of his own nation, but of the armies of Allies. One of the greatest tributes to Foch's strength of will and character is that in this time of trial he kept the confidence of the Allied armies and of the Allied Governments, and both M. Clemenceau and Mr. Lloyd George deserve their full share of credit for the trust which they reposed in him despite the inauspicious overture to unity of command. The days were now fast approaching when this trust was to have its reward.

Ludendorff's March offensive had led to an appeal from the British Government to the United States of America to expedite the dispatch of troops to France. This appeal met with a prompt and warm response, and resulted in one of the most remarkable achievements of the whole war. Just as in the March crisis Foch had hastened the arrival of the French reserves, so by one means or another the transport

of men across the Atlantic was increased until from the month of June onwards 300,000 American soldiers were brought over each month, a feat of transportation which is without parallel in the history of war. This feat, which upset all Ludendorff's calculations as to the rate at which American troops could reach France, was made possible by the spirit and enthusiasm of the American people, by the supremacy of the British Navy, and by the self-denial of the British people, who, in order to save tonnage to bring American troops to France, willingly accepted restrictions upon imports into Great Britain which imposed upon them very real privations.

By the beginning of June these measures had begun to take effect, and the number of American divisions in France mounted very rapidly. At the same time a steady stream of seasoned British troops, withdrawn from other theatres of war, was pouring into France, and, owing to the respite which Ludendorff allowed the British army while he was forcing his way toward the Marne, there was time for Sir Douglas Haig to assimilate and train the drafts sent out from England. This work of reconstructing the British army was much helped by the arrival on the British front of several American divisions, of which some went into the line and thus enabled British divisions to be withdrawn for rest and training.

So it came about that though by the middle of June the Germans were within forty miles of Paris

and within forty miles of Calais and Boulogne, and Ludendorff had still strong reserves at his disposal, yet the danger of a crushing German victory was daily growing smaller. This was shown by the result of Ludendorff's fourth offensive, which took place in the second week of June, and was intended to improve the position created by the German Crown Prince's surprise at the Chemin des Dames. The drive to the Marne had left the Germans in possession of a triangular salient some twenty-six miles deep and about thirty-three miles wide at the base along the Aisne, the apex of the triangle being at Château-Thierry. The triangle was somewhat confined for the assembly of large forces within it, and Ludendorff wanted more elbow room. Therefore one of the Crown Prince's generals, von Hutier, attempted to widen the base of the triangle to the west of Soissons by an attack delivered between the Amiens and the Marne salients. The immediate objective of this attack was Compiègne, and had von Hutier succeeded in taking that town he would have linked up the two salients and have given Ludendorff a much more convenient front for an attack upon Paris. Foch, however, was ready, and foiled von Hutier by a counter-attack which was an earnest of what was to come later. The Germans did not reach Compiègne, their position for an attack upon Paris was not appreciably improved, and they got little return for very heavy losses.

The Last Four Months

After von Hutier's attack was brought to a stop Ludendorff set about preparing for his great effort. As to the result of this effort the Germans were more blatantly confident and boastful than they had been any time since their first victories of August, 1914. They said that the British army had been exhausted by its defeats in the spring, and that we had no men with which to make good our losses. They said that it was utterly impossible that America should have in the time created armies fit to fight in battle, that the Allies were bluffing when they spoke about the large number of American troops in France. They said that the Allies had not at their disposal the shipping to make such movement of troops possible. The U-boats had seen to that.* Ludendorff informed his Government on the eve of the battle that victory was certain, a fact not mentioned by Ludendorff in his "Reminiscences," but disclosed by von Hintze, who was then Secretary for Foreign Affairs. As to the quality of the American troops, the German authorities issued this remarkable statement:

"Demonstrations against the war are the order of the day in New York. Of the enthusiasm

*"Russia collapsed. There then arose the possibility which, before the autumn of 1917, no one had contemplated of seeking to bring about a decision of the war during 1918, by an attack on land, which would be certain to succeed if by that time the U-boat campaign had reduced tonnage to an extent which made the rapid transport of American troops impossible, or if our submarines were able to hit some of the enemy's transports. According to the reports made by the Navy this was to be expected."—Ludendorff, p. 332.

announced in the Entente reports there is no trace amongst the Americans who have been called up for military service. Soldiers on embarkation almost make a despairing impression, and are kept together by a police force which has been specially created for the purpose."

This is but one of a large number of official and semi-official pronouncements distributed to the German press and amongst the German troops during the summer of 1918, and this policy of deception was, I believe, one of the contributory causes of the suddenness of the collapse when things began to go wrong. Soldiers and people then discovered that those in authority over them had either been lying to them or had been hopelessly wrong in their judgment, and they lost faith just at the time when faith was most needed. It is not at present easy to determine how far these misrepresentations were deliberate on the part of the German authorities and how far the responsibility lay with agents who sought for and sent in information which would be pleasing rather than the truth. The German spy system has always been held up as a model of efficiency, and the popular belief was that the Germans knew everything which went on inside our lines or took place at our most secret councils. It is certainly true that the German spy system was very elaborate, and that it gave their authorities good information upon points of detail, but the test of any system of intelligence

is the correctness or otherwise of the impression which it creates in the minds of the generals and statesmen who use it, and at every great crisis in this war the German intelligence system created a wrong impression.

In July, 1914, the Germans believed that Belgium would be terrorised into submission and that Great Britain, being fully occupied with Irish and labour troubles, would not fight. A month later, before the first battle of the Marne, they held that the British army had been annihilated and that the *moral* of the French troops was broken. The Kaiser had arranged the details of his entry into Paris, and had ordered a gala luncheon at the Hôtel Majestic, near the Arc de Triomphe. In the spring of 1917 they believed that Great Britain was on the verge of starvation, and that six months of unrestricted U-boat warfare would bring us to our knees.* They were so completely out in their understanding of the psychology of the American people that they did not understand that an order to the United States not to send across the Atlantic more than one vessel a week, which was to be painted in a particular way and to follow a particular route to a particular British port, would infallibly arouse and unite all classes in an irresistible enthusiasm for the war. In September, 1917, Ludendorff, in a review of the position which

* Ludendorff thought this would take a year, but believed it would be accomplished before America could intervene effectively.—p. 249.

he submitted to his Government, implied that Great Britain, France and Italy were on the verge of exhaustion, and that their internal condition was more precarious than that of Germany, whose military position was far the stronger. No account was taken in this document of the effect of America's economic and financial aid to the Entente. In July, 1918, before the second battle of the Marne, the Germans were equally out in their count, and they christened beforehand the battle which they were to fight the "Friedensturm," the attack which would bring peace—of course a German peace. The Kaiser had a grand stand built for himself on a wooded height overlooking the Marne, and to this he mounted on the morning of July 15 to see his troops advance to victory.

While the Germans were busy with their preparations for winning the war by one great final blow, Foch was also at work. He had divined Ludendorff's plan, and he was quite certain that the Germans meant to attack upon both sides of Reims—that is to say, that the German Crown Prince would renew his attempts to get to Paris. It happened, however, that the other Crown Prince, the Bavarian Rupprecht, had strong reserves in Flanders, and a short advance there would, as I have already pointed out, place the German guns within range of the Channel ports. Foch had been wrong in May, and he might be wrong again this time. He was himself confident

that he was right, but he had to convince the Allied statesmen that he was right, for he did not feel himself strong enough to deal with the German Crown Prince without drawing upon Haig for troops, and thus weakening the armies covering the Channel coast. He first sent southwards the eight French divisions which had been aiding us in Flanders, and asked Haig to move four British divisions to the neighbourhood of Amiens to relieve four more French divisions. This was a very serious reduction of Haig's strength; but Foch was not satisfied, and he asked that these four British divisions should be handed over to him for the counter-offensive which he was planning, and that yet other four British divisions should take their place about Amiens. Haig being responsible to his Government for the safety of his army and the ports, felt that he must obtain their concurrence in this last step, though he was quite ready to take the responsibility upon himself of advising them to concur. It does honour to Foch, to Mr. Lloyd George, and to Sir Douglas Haig that in this critical time they all agreed. Both the British Government and the British Commander-in-Chief supported Foch, decided to back his judgment, and to accept the danger of weakening the British forces in the north, and he was thus enabled to mature his plans for the defeat of Ludendorff.

Many a general's plans in war have been upset because he was compelled by a nervous Government

to strengthen the defence of some point which they held to be vital to the national safety. The instances are few in which a Government has shown itself ready to shoulder such responsibility as Mr. Lloyd George undertook on this occasion. Yet with the memory of what happened in April and May he had every excuse for hesitation. Fortunately courage and a readiness to take risks for a great end are characteristics of the Prime Minister.

Foch's plans were based on a prolonged study of the conditions of trench warfare. The war on the Western front has been repeatedly compared to a great siege. That comparison is accurate only up to a certain point. The conditions of trench warfare were, after due allowance is made for the changes due to modern improvements in arms, very like those which prevailed in some of the great sieges of the past. There was the same deadly monotony of life in the trenches; there was a return to the weapons used in the past in the attack and defence of fortresses —hand grenades, mortars and heavy artillery; there were the same hardships to be endured, due to the stationary life in holes dug in the ground, wet, cold and mud in winter, heat, dust and flies in summer; there were sallies by defenders and raids by the attackers, there were struggles for the outworks, and when the defenders tried to break out or the attackers to break in they both began by blasting a great breach in the defences with a concentrated bombardment of

heavy artillery and followed this with an assault by the infantry. There, however, the analogy ends. In the old days, once the assailants had broken through the defences into the town which they protected, their work was, with some rare exceptions, finished, and the place was at their mercy, but in the great war the worst of the struggle then began. The defender, who was not cooped up in a town, but had ample space behind his lines and plenty of roads and railways at his disposal, was able to keep his reserves far back, where they could rest undisturbed by the enemy's artillery, and to bring them up fresh to the battlefield at a time when the attacking infantry was becoming wearied, when it had been thrown more or less into confusion by the stress of battle, when the difficulty of sending forward reinforcements and supplies of food and ammunition was for the assailant at its greatest. The essential difference between the siege warfare of old and the warfare as we have seen it during the great struggle in France and Belgium is that in the former a successful assault normally finished the business and brought victory; in the latter, the assault was but a prelude to a battle with the enemy's reserves.

From November, 1914, when trench lines were first established between the North Sea and the Swiss frontier, all the generals on the Western front, British, French and German, were at work trying to solve the problem of how to break through. At first it was believed that this was mainly a question of

having sufficient guns and sufficient ammunition of the right kind, of blasting a big enough hole in the defences. In 1915 Foch, with British help on his left flank, tried twice to capture the Vimy Ridge, and both times he failed with very heavy losses. In the same year Joffre tried, by a great assault delivered in Champagne, to burst through the German lines, and he, too, failed. In the first half of 1916 the Germans, using much the same method of an artillery bombardment, followed by an infantry assault, tried to reach Verdun and were defeated. In the summer and autumn of that year Haig fought the first battle of the Somme, which relieved Verdun and forced the Germans to retreat into the Hindenburg line, but ended there, like the other battles, in the deadlock of trench warfare. In 1917 General Nivelle succeeded General Joffre in the supreme command of the French armies, and though Haig, in the battle of Arras, carried out the part assigned to him by Nivelle, and the British army bit deep into the German lines, capturing the Vimy Ridge, Nivelle's great attack on the Aisne front ended in a failure, which shook the confidence of the French army.

Up to this time it had been argued that the success won had been sufficient to warrant the hope that with more and heavier guns, improved methods of gunnery and larger supplies of shell, the breach would be wider and deeper and that the assault must succeed. So the military policy in the Western

theatre of war during 1915 and 1916 continued to be to increase the power and duration of the bombardment, and when a battle did not give the results expected it was always possible, as the munition factories of the Allies grew in size and numbers, to look forward to a still greater bombardment next time. But in 1917 the Allies suffered from no lack of equipment, and it was quite evident that lack of success was no longer due to lack of shell. The colossal bombardments which heralded these attacks literally tore off the surface of the ground. The guns had done their part, the breach was made, but the story was always the same. The first bound forward of the attackers was almost invariably successful, and they easily overcame such of the enemy as remained alive in the bombarded area, with comparatively little loss to themselves. Then up came the enemy's reserves, and a slow hammer and tongs struggle developed, in which the attackers slowly gained ground at a very high price until gradually the attack lost its momentum and died away from exhaustion. Clearly the great bombardment was not the key to the problem, and it was necessary to look for some other solution.

During the autumn of 1916 and the summer of 1917 the French and British had fought a number of what in these days would be called small battles with complete success, the French around Verdun and on the Aisne front, the British on the Messines Ridge in

Flanders. In these battles there was no attempt made to push the infantry far beyond the limits of the area which had been thoroughly pounded in the first bombardment, and in each of these ground was gained and a considerable number of prisoners and guns captured very cheaply. This confirmed the experience gained in the opening phases of most of the great battles, namely, that it was comparatively easy for the guns to win the ground within their range and for the infantry then to advance and occupy it. The Allies did not possess a sufficient number of guns to allow them to deliver a rapid succession of these punches against the different parts of the front, and it took a long time to shift a mass of artillery from one part of the line to another, but it was believed that a series of such blows delivered on the same front would end in the exhaustion of the German reserves and in a break through. This was called the attack with limited objective. The guns were to bombard an area of ground and the infantry to go forward and overcome the Germans, dazed and stunned by the bombardment; then the guns were to be moved forward on to the ground won, and the process was to be repeated until the infantry were able to break clean through.

On this principle the third battle of Ypres was fought by the British army in the late summer and autumn of 1917. That battle began on July 31, but, unfortunately, the month of August proved to be

phenomenally wet and Ludendorff had devised a very successful answer to this form of attack. The mud of Flanders proved a terrible obstacle. It made the bringing forward of the guns and the masses of ammunition needed to feed them a work almost beyond human power, and the infantry had to endure indescribable hardship, with no cover from the enemy's fire save such as could be found in water-logged shell-holes and trenches pounded by our artillery into a sticky mess. At every step forward they sank to their knees or over into the gluey slime, which the soil of Flanders becomes when torn by shells and saturated with rain. Added to all this, the Germans neutralised the effect of the bombardment, upon which the plan of attack depended so largely for its success, by withdrawing all but a few men from the ground which would be most heavily shelled by us, and by meeting our weary infantry as they dragged themselves forward through the mud with counter-attacks by fresh troops. So the fight up the ridges from Ypres to Passchendaele was a long, slow, costly business, and it came to an end before the problem of beating the enemy's reserves had been solved.

Then a new experiment was tried. Tanks had been first used by the British army in the battle of the Somme in small numbers. There are a great many people who believed, and still believe, that this was a great mistake; they hold that we should have waited until we had tanks in large numbers and then sprung

a great surprise on the Germans. But it is an impossibility to simulate in practice the conditions of war, or to be certain how any new device will turn out until it has been tried in the field against the enemy. Further, the efficacy of any device to be used in war does not depend only, or even chiefly, upon its own perfections or imperfections; it depends mainly upon how it fits into the military machine. All the parts of an army, artillery, infantry, cavalry, tanks, machine-guns and aircraft have to learn to work together, to know what each can do and what are the needs of each, and this can only be learned by long practice together. The first experience of the tanks, in the autumn of 1916 and spring of 1917, was disappointing. They were found to be too slow to keep pace even with the infantry, they broke down frequently, and there were many kinds of ground which they could not get over. In the battle of Messines the infantry found that the artillery had done all and more than all that was needed, and for the most part they did not wait for the tanks. In the third battle of Ypres the mud proved altogether too much for the new weapon. So for a time many of our generals and most of the infantry distrusted the tanks and regarded them as a failure. This did not damp the enthusiasm of the experts, who worked incessantly at improving the tanks, at devising new methods of employing them, and at showing the infantry how to work with them, and in November,

1917, the tanks got their first real chance. Haig decided to make a surprise attack on the very strongest part of the German front, the Hindenburg line west of Cambrai.

Hitherto, the time and labour required to collect a great mass of guns and the huge stores of shell for them had made it almost impossible to surprise the enemy, for this involved the extension of railway lines, the laying of tramways, the construction of roads, and a great increase in the normal traffic behind the lines. The German aeroplanes and spies always found out that something was up. Haig proposed to bring up a large number of tanks secretly at the last possible moment and to use them instead of guns to make the breach for his infantry. The Germans had sent most of their reserves up to Flanders to meet our attacks at Passchendaele, and, relying on the strength of the Hindenburg line, had weakened the Cambrai front. The surprise was completely successful, and the tanks more than justified themselves by breaking clean through the most formidable defences which the Germans had been able to devise and by preparing the way for the advance of the infantry. Unfortunately, as I have already mentioned, the disaster to the Italian army occurred at Caporetto, and Haig had to send five divisions southward to the help of our Allies, despite his urgent request to be allowed to keep at least two to support his attack at Cambrai. None of our five

divisions fired a shot before the enemy were checked on the Piave, and we were furnished with a classical example of the advantages to a skilful enemy of interior lines of communication. This reduction in his strength so weakened Haig that he was unable to follow up his success, and when the German reserves arrived they won back a good part of the ground we had gained.

This, then, was the position at the beginning of 1918, when Ludendorff was bringing his troops across from Russia and preparing for his great offensive. The attempt to break through by means of a great bombardment followed by an infantry assault had failed, so had the attempt to break through by means of a series of bombardments and assaults upon one part of the front; the attack with limited objective, the short, sharp punch in which the infantry moved forward and occupied the ground won in a single bombardment had proved a success, but the results gained by this method of attack had made little impression upon the whole long front; the use of tanks in numbers, in replacement of the prolonged bombardment, held out promise for the future. Ludendorff was deeply impressed by our surprise attack at Cambrai, and believed he could break through if he brought off a surprise. He had very few tanks and no prospects of getting a large number, for the German munition factories could not at this period of the war find the necessary

material; they had, in fact, more than they could do to keep the armies supplied with motor transport.

In 1918 the Germans had barely a score of tanks of their own manufacture, and these were of a type little, if at all, superior to our tanks of 1916. They had added to these by repairing some of the tanks which they had captured from us, but at no time did they possess any large number. It does not appear that Ludendorff was particularly impressed with the value of tanks before the events of the summer of 1918 taught him wisdom in this respect. He had, during the autumn of 1917, prepared an able memorandum on our methods in attack, in which he adverted on the dependence of our infantry upon what he termed material, its failures to seize opportunities when they presented themselves, and the delay caused by continually relieving infantry in the front line. Much that he said was very true, particularly as regards our reliance upon bombardment as a means of gaining ground, but when he included tanks in his condemnation of "material" he forgot that he was writing of a new weapon capable of improvement. The development of aircraft during the course of the war should have taught him caution. It was not the tanks of Cambrai which made him think, but the effect produced by surprise. We lost a great number of tanks in that battle, because we had not yet learned how to use them, and did not appreciate their depend-

ence upon the support of artillery, and Ludendorff, thinking of the success of the German counter-attack at Cambrai and of the derelict tanks lying within his lines, classed that battle as a "battle of material." So he did not press his War Office to find means to provide him with tanks, and he set about getting his surprise by other methods. I have already described those methods and the measure of success which they achieved. He certainly, in his attacks in the first half of 1918, gained more ground, took more prisoners and guns and inflicted heavier losses than any other general had succeeded in doing on the Western front. He was very nearly successful in his first drive for Amiens in March. He failed, as all other generals had failed, because his progress was stopped by the defender's reserves. Just at the time when the German troops were wearied, when it was becoming impossible to sustain the momentum of the attack by sending forward fresh troops and supplies from the rear, Foch brought the French troops from the south upon the scene.

Then Ludendorff made the mistake of trying for just a little more. His first effort had worn itself out by March 29, with the failure of the great attack upon the Arras front, but six days later, on April 4, after an interval not long enough for the systematic preparation of a fresh battle, but long enough for the Allies to strengthen their forces and improve their defences, he made another attempt to break through

which was shattered and only served to deplete his strength. He repeated this mistake in Flanders at the end of April, when he thought he had found another soft spot. At this time it was a question whether he would be able to keep forces enough in hand for a last smashing blow before the arrival of American troops finally turned the scale in favour of the Allies, and he fell into the same error as every other German general on the Western front, the error of underrating his enemy and believing that the next blow must be the smashing blow. When his first attack in Flanders had been checked he tried again on April 29 and suffered a severe defeat. The effect of his failures of March 28, April 5, and April 29 was that he required time to make good his losses, rest his troops, train them and replenish his stores of munitions. When the Crown Prince's attacks in May and June were stopped by the action of the American troops at Château-Thierry and by Foch's counter-attacks, Ludendorff needed a full month to prepare for his last effort, and during that month the Allied reserves, far from being used up, were growing daily stronger. The German had failed to solve the problem. The reserves stood between him and victory.

A short time before the Germans started their last offensive battle of the war a meeting of the Supreme War Council took place at Versailles. The Allied statesmen were naturally very anxious about

the situation. The Germans were still within forty miles of Paris and within the same distance of the Channel ports, and they had sprung three great surprises upon us in two months. The British generals had not thought it possible that the Germans would get almost to the outskirts of Amiens, would capture Kemmel Hill and menace Hazebrouck; Foch had not foreseen that the German Crown Prince would reach the Marne. It was true that the balance of strength had been steadily shifting in our favour. The British army had made a marvellous recovery from its reverses in the spring, and with the arrival of seasoned troops from Palestine, who had not suffered the heavy losses endured by all our troops on the Western front and, therefore, had a far higher proportion of men in the prime of life, and of experienced officers and non-commissioned officers, was in as good shape as ever. Haig's strength, which had fallen to forty-nine effective divisions in May, had risen in July to fifty-three divisions, and, thanks to the development of our munition factories, not only had our heavy losses in guns and war material been promptly replaced, but we were stronger in artillery, machine-guns, tanks and aeroplanes than we had been in March.

When Pershing heard at the end of March that the conference of Doullens had appointed Foch to the supreme command he had four combatant divisions to offer the new Generalissimo, but of these only one, the 1st American Division, was considered sufficiently

trained to take its place in the line. Early in July there were twenty-five American divisions in France, and twelve of them had completed their training and were ready to take part in battle; such had been the effect of the speeding up of the transport of American troops across the Atlantic.

While the forces under Foch's control had been growing, Ludendorff's had begun to dwindle. The Germans had reached their greatest strength early in May, when they had two hundred and seven divisions on the Western front, but they had not found it possible to replace at once all the losses incurred in the battles of May and June. Altogether the position was much more favourable than it had been six weeks before, yet the fighting strength of the Germans was still greater than that of the Allies. On the eve of the second battle of the Marne they had a superiority of over a quarter of a million rifles; in guns they were about equal to the Allied artillery; it was only in machine-guns, tanks and aircraft that they were inferior. With the flow of American troops to France assured, Foch was certain of having an ample reserve in due time, and Ludendorff had no means of increasing his; but at the moment the number of American troops trained to take part in battle was not sufficient to give the Allies a definite numerical superiority at the front. So the statesmen were still anxious, feeling that they could not afford a fourth surprise by the Germans.

Foch *versus* Ludendorff

Foch was always and rightly reticent as to his plans. He would not do more than express his confidence in general terms. The essential difference between his mind and the minds of the German generals was that he regarded war as an art, not as a science. "There is nothing absolute in war," is one of his favourite axioms. He believed it to be beyond the power of the human mind to foresee all the factors that would influence the actions of the opposing general, all the changes and chances on the front which would influence the actions of opposing troops and often decide the issue of battles. Therefore he acted on certain broad principles which, he was persuaded, governed the application of his art, just as there are principles which govern the arts of painting, music and architecture; but he could no more tell beforehand what form each of his strokes would take than a painter can tell you beforehand with what stroke of his brush he will get his effects. The artist's strokes depend upon the inspiration and the circumstances of the moment, but they are not haphazard strokes. They are all made in accordance with the principles of art and on a general plan. The Germans, on the other hand, believed more in the plan than in the inspiration. They were very good planners. Von Moltke's first plan for the invasion of France was excellent; so, in its details, was Ludendorff's plan for his offensive in March, 1918. Both failed in the execution of their plans because they

allowed scientific planning to take precedence of the principles of the art. So Foch did not tell the Allied statesmen assembled at Versailles, in these trying days when the Germans were engaged in tuning up their war machines for their last great blow, very much of his plans. One of them asked him point blank: "But, General, if the Germans do make their great attack, what is your plan?" and Foch answered by striking out three rapid blows, with his right, with his left and again with his right, following these by launching out a vigorous kick. There was the principle of the art dramatically described.

Foch had been thinking deeply over the problems of the war which I have described in the first part of this chapter—how to break through, how to defeat the enemy's reserves, how to apply the old principles of war to the new conditions of trench warfare, which made a war of movement and manœuvre as it had been conceived in the past impossible. He had had his bitter experiences like other generals. His attacks on the Vimy Ridge had failed, and he had acquired a reputation in certain quarters of being reckless, regardless of the lives of his men. Statesmen, anxiously watching the appalling casualty lists and the dwindling man-power of the nation, were suspicious of a general with such a reputation. It is not generally known that for a time Foch was under a cloud. After a nasty motor accident which befell him in the summer of 1916, he was given the duty of

studying the possibility of a German invasion through Switzerland, a job which, for a time, practically put him on the shelf, and after he had finished that he was literally placed on the shelf for a few weeks, early in 1917, when he was actually put on half pay. From this he was recalled, largely, I believe, through the influence of M. Clemenceau, who had not then become Prime Minister of France, to be Chief of Staff in Paris. While in Paris he had time for thinking. The main facts before him were the failure of the great assault upon one part of the front, the terrible cost in life of the slow hammer and tongs struggle in which it always ended, and the success of the limited punches. Therefore, as a principle, he determined not to be drawn into a protracted struggle, not to attempt the great break through until the enemy's reserves were exhausted, and he proposed to exhaust these reserves by a series of limited punches. Hence the three short, sharp blows, followed by the big kick. Not that he had in July, 1918, worked out in detail the great plan by which the war was won. He could not have told the statesmen in Versailles whether he would be ready for the big kick in the autumn of 1918 or whether he would have to wait for it until the following year. He has said himself that all that he had in his mind when he delivered his first punch on July 18 in the second battle of the Marne was to relieve Paris and that the purpose of the second punch, made by Haig on August 8, was to relieve

Amiens. It was only when the succession of victories won by the British army between August 8 and September 9 began to produce the effect at which Foch was aiming, the exhaustion of the German reserves, an effect made certain by Pershing's victory of September 12 at St. Mihiel, that he decided on the great battle which began on September 26 and decided the result of the war.

All other generals on the Western front had tried the big kick too soon; most of them had begun with it and had not thought it necessary or possible to prepare for the maximum effort of which they were capable by preliminary fighting. In distant Mesopotamia Maude at the end of 1916 had, by a carefully planned series of limited attacks, worn down the resistance of the Turks and had then forced his way across the Tigris and routed their army; but those operations were, as compared with the vast front in France, on a small scale, and the enemy was very inferior in skill and equipment to the Germans, so the application of Maude's methods to the problems of the Western front did not leap to the eye. In 1917 Haig was, as I have said, near reaching the solution at Cambrai, but the Caporetto disaster supervened, and Cambrai became a secondary enterprise instead of the climax of a great campaign. In the spring of 1918 Ludendorff had, as I have pointed out, made a great advance in battle tactics, but he committed the mistake of aiming from the first at a break-through,

and he allowed himself in each battle to be drawn too far by his early success, so that he was too late and too weak when he was ready for the *Friedensturm*.

Foch had always taught before the war that the decisive act of the battle in the war of manœuvre must be prepared systematically by a number of preliminary combats, and that the opening for the knock-out blow had to be created. That was a military doctrine which was universally accepted. He discovered how to apply to the new conditions of trench warfare these old principles of war, and therein lies his title to greatness. Fortune favours the brave and the thoughtful, and Foch was fortunate in that the fierce struggles which had preceded the turn in the tide of war had been very far from fruitless. The great offensive campaigns of the Allies and their resolute courage in defence had sapped the military strength of Germany, and in July, 1918, the cream of her army had perished. Foch had to put the finishing touches to a process which had been long at work. The advent of the American armies gave him the men, the vast output of the Allied munition factories the material, in particular the great improvements which had been made in the tanks since their first appearance in battle and the quantities of them available gave him just the means he needed for carrying through his scheme. Cambrai had proved that tanks could replace the long bombardment and obviate all the slow preparation which it involved.

Even Cambrai had not, however, established that confidence between the infantry and the tanks which was essential to success, nor had the co-operation between tanks and artillery been completely worked out. Cambrai had shown that tanks are particularly vulnerable to artillery fire, and the Germans were known to have placed a number of guns in forward positions along their front for the special purpose of dealing with our tanks. At Cambrai one resolute German artillery officer, working his gun to the last from behind a park wall, had knocked out a number of our tanks as they came in view, much as a sportsman bowls over rabbits bolting from ferrets in a warren. Early in July a comparatively small operation carried out by Rawlinson's Fourth Army settled all these problems. Haig was even then planning a battle to free Amiens, but the clearing of the Villers-Bretton-neux plateau and the capture of Hamel was a necessary preliminary to the larger adventure. Rawlinson entrusted this task to the Australian Corps, who were given sixty of the newest type of tanks to help them. The choice was happy, for the Australians had had an unfortunate experience with tanks at Bullecourt in 1917 and were distrustful of them. The work of infantry and tanks in combination was carefully practised beforehand, and on July 4, when the attack took place, it was carried through "according to plan." The tanks, working behind a powerful artillery barrage, which protected them from the enemy's guns,

overcame the German machine-guns and drove their infantry into their dug-outs, where they fell an easy prey to our infantry. Thereafter, the Australians could not speak too highly of the tanks, and mutual confidence was established.

This little engagement, which ended in the capture of all our objectives and of one thousand five hundred prisoners, was also noteworthy for the fact that four companies of the 33rd American Division took part in it. These men had been training in the line with the Australians and had eagerly prepared to join in the fight when at the last moment orders came up that they were not to participate, as their training for battle was not completed. Nevertheless, they went over the top with the Australians, who are reported to have said of them that the Americans were good lads but too rough!

With this fortunate experiment faith in the tanks spread. The commanders already believed in them, and now that belief in their power to "make good" spread to the ranks. Nor was this the only good which the action of Hamel brought us. Our reverses in the spring had naturally affected the *moral* of the army. The men had never wavered in their determination to hold on, to "stick it out," but their confidence in their superiority over the enemy and in their power to drive him back had been shaken when they saw him gaining more ground and making larger captures than either we or the French had ever suc-

ceeded in doing. It was as essential to restore that confidence before we could hope to attack successfully on a great scale as it was to establish confidence between tanks and infantry. Rawlinson, in a series of minor operations, of which Hamel was the latest and the most successful, shook the enemy's confidence and built up that of his own men, and the brilliant work of the tanks added the last touch, so that when the crisis came both men and material were ready. Tanks made surprise, that greatest weapon of generalship, much easier than it had been, they saved life and economised troops, and, therefore, that quick succession of punches for which Foch was seeking his opportunity became possible. The artist had his materials to hand. Honour to him that he knew how to use them.

CHAPTER III

THE PREPARATION FOR ARMAGEDDON

The Second Battle of the Marne—Haig's Offensive—The Americans at St. Mihiel

LUDENDORFF'S *Friedensturm* was to be developed from the salient with its head at Château-Thierry on the Marne, which the German Crown Prince had made in his May attack. The Germans had spent the time since that attack was stopped in training their men for just such another assault, and proposed again to pour in a mass of troops wherever they could make a hole in the Allied defences. But railways are necessary to keep a mass of troops supplied with their needs in battle, and it happened that the only railways which could be used to supply the German troops in the Château-Thierry salient passed through the town of Soissons, which lay in the north-west corner of the salient not far from the German front line. For his advance upon Paris Ludendorff wanted railways on the eastern side of the salient as well. Therefore, the first part of his plan involved the capture of Reims, so that he might repair and use the railways running through that city. He intended to capture Reims by a big attack delivered on the Champagne front to the east of the town, combined

with another attack to the south-west of Reims. These attacks were designed to unite on the river Marne near Epernay and thus cut off Reims and all the troops defending it. Simultaneously, a third attack was to be made southwards across the Marne between Château-Thierry and Dormans. When these attacks had all developed satisfactorily the German troops on the western face of the salient between Soissons and Château-Thierry were to come in and co-operate in the advance upon Paris, and for this purpose their troops were, at the beginning of July, reorganised under a general and staff recently brought across from the Russian front. This was a big scheme, but there is evidence that it was intended to be still bigger and that Ludendorff proposed, when his movement against Paris astride the Marne was in full swing, to develop yet another attack upon Paris from the north by issuing from the Amiens salient which he had created in March, and that farther north still Rupprecht was preparing for an advance in Flanders.

Probably owing to the carelessness engendered by over-confidence the Germans took fewer pains to conceal their intentions before this battle than they had done earlier in the year, and Foch was ready for Ludendorff's first moves, which opened on July 15.* The great attack to the east of Reims fell upon

* Ludendorff says that before the battle the coming attack near Reims was talked of throughout Germany.—p. 535.

the army of General Gouraud, who adopted and improved upon the same defensive tactics as we had intended to use against the Germans in the March battles, but had been prevented by the fog from applying successfully with the single exception of the battle on the Arras front on March 28. Gouraud, applying these tactics with better fortune and great skill, foiled the enemy's plans. He had the good luck to capture a party of Germans on the eve of the attack, and from these prisoners he ascertained the exact time at which the bombardment would open and the enemy's infantry advance. He left in his front trenches only a few troops to watch for and break up the German assault, and withdrew his main line of resistance behind the area swept by the full storm of the hostile bombardment, while his own guns, which had been reinforced, poured a tornado of shell upon the German infantry as it moved forward, with the result that it was a disordered mass of field-greys which flung itself against the French battle positions, and except at two points on either flank of the attack these withstood the shock. The small breaches which the Germans succeeded in making were quickly closed, and the attack ended for them in a disastrous defeat.

This brilliant defence by Gouraud, in the centre of whose army stood part of the 42nd American Division, laid the foundation for our subsequent victories and of itself was sufficient to cause the failure

of Ludendorff's plan, for one arm of the pincers with which he had intended to nip out Reims had failed to act, and twenty-five picked German divisions specially rested and trained for the enterprise had been shattered. Throughout the three and a half years of trench warfare on the Western front no attack made on such a scale had met with so little success in its opening phase. It had come to be regarded as inevitable that the defender should lose ground, prisoners and guns. Gouraud lost very little more ground than that which he had deliberately abandoned to the enemy, few prisoners and no guns.

While these events were taking place to the east of Reims the Germans, in their remaining two attacks south-west of the city and across the Marne between Château-Thierry and Dormans, did make some progress, and before Foch struck back he wished to see that front steadied. It was steadied mainly by the firm courage of the American troops who formed part of General Degoutte's army, and particularly of the 3rd and 28th American Divisions, which held the sector east of Château-Thierry, and by the stout resistance of Berthelot's army on the heights south of Reims. On the 17th it looked to be possible for a time that the Germans would force their way up the Marne valley to Epernay, but the gap which they had made was not wide enough, and they were in the position of a man who has got his head through a fence but finds the hole too small for his body.

Then, on the fourth day of the battle, July 18, Foch sprang the first surprise, for which he had been quietly preparing, upon the Germans. While the enemy were still trying to make progress from the southern and eastern faces of the Marne salient, General Mangin attacked the western face between Soissons and Château-Thierry. It required great courage and determination to make that attack as it was made. The Germans had still a superiority of more than 250,000 infantry on the Western front, and Foch, as well as Mr. Lloyd George and Sir Douglas Haig, had to take risks. When the first plans for that counter-stroke were made by the French generals on the spot they considered that the most which they could do was to attack on a front of some twelve miles. Foch came down and insisted that the front of attack should be more than doubled. "We haven't the men!" said the French generals. "I know that," replied Foch; "still you must attack the whole of the German flank." The spirit which turned the first battle of the Marne into a decisive victory for the Allies was to win in the second battle of the Marne another triumph.

The popular faith in Foch's army of manœuvre led to the belief that the Generalissimo had brought up large reinforcements of fresh troops at the right moment and had overwhelmed the Germans with superior numbers. This was very far from

being the case, and Foch had, in fact, at his disposal few troops who could by any stretch of imagination be called fresh. The French divisions were tired by the long defensive struggle which followed on the Crown Prince's May attack. The 1st American Division was on its way to a well-deserved rest after a long spell in the line on the Montdidier front, the 2nd American Division had only been relieved in the first week of July after its bitter struggle in Belleu Wood. Of all the Allied troops on the western side of the German salient only the 26th American Division, which had taken the place of the 2nd north of the Marne, was unwearied by its previous efforts. But Pershing was as convinced as was Foch himself of the importance of a counter-attack against the German flank and insisted that his 1st and 2nd Divisions could and would fight, and they were brought up to strengthen Mangin's battle.

The 1st American Division only reached its positions on the evening of the 17th, while part of the infantry of the 2nd Division did not come up until the attack was actually in progress. The late arrival of this reinforcement helped to keep the Germans in the dark as to what was afoot, and Mangin was able to use the great forests of Villers-Cotterets, which lay behind his post, to screen his preparations. His method was adapted from those employed by Haig at Cambrai in the previous November. He opened with a very short but intense

bombardment which lasted just long enough to drive the Germans to their dug-outs and to cut their telephone communication. Then a mass of tanks followed the barrage through the German defences, to be followed in turn by a rush of French and American infantry. The Germans were taken completely by surprise.* They had been thinking only of their advance to Paris, and had neglected their trenches, with the result that there were none of the formidable rear lines of defence which they had been wont to throw up rapidly and skilfully with the aid of the forced labour of the French peasants and of prisoners of war.† Mangin's chief object was to get to a position from which he could prevent the Germans from using the railways passing through Soissons. His main effort had been made between the Aisne and the Ourcq, the front of battle being extended south of that river by a French division and the 26th American Division. By the evening of July 19 Mangin's guns dominated both the railway junction and also the main road connecting Soissons and Château-Thierry.

Ludendorff had failed to get Reims, and now had lost the use of the one artery of supply which enabled him to maintain the great mass of troops he had crowded into the Marne salient. His troops across

* Ludendorff mentions that two deserters came over to the Germans on the 11th and said that a great tank attack was in preparation in the Villers-Cotteret forest. As the days passed and nothing happened, the Germans appear to have believed that this was a false alarm (p. 534).

† Ludendorff makes the influenza epidemic largely responsible for this neglect. *Ibid.*

the river, struggling hard to maintain what they had won, were at once in difficulties, and there was nothing left but to withdraw them. That withdrawal was not easy, for a Franco-American counter-attack had given the Allies possession of heights on the south bank of the river from which many of the bridges thrown by the Germans could be shelled, while the enemy's infantry was continually harassed by attacks from the air.

Now, as I have explained, the principle upon which Foch had determined to act was to deliver a series of punches, each with a definite but limited object. His idea was to press the enemy so long as he gave way before the punch, but to avoid a slow, protracted struggle when the German resistance began to harden. So Mangin, having achieved his purpose of taking the railways through Soissons, stopped, rested and relieved his troops, and it fell to Degoutte to attack next in a north-easterly direction from the Château-Thierry front against the Germans yielding on the Marne. The fresh vigour of the Americans—28th, 3rd and 26th Divisions, with the 4th and 32nd in support—swept the enemy back from the Marne to the Ourcq, behind which river they attempted to stand between Oulchy-le-Château and Fère-en-Tardenois. Simultaneously, two of the four British divisions sent down from the north by Haig, the 51st and 62nd, reinforced the French and Italian forces on the eastern side of the salient, and there, too,

but more slowly, the Germans were compelled to give ground. Meantime, the two remaining British divisions, the 15th and the 34th,* joined Mangin, who, on July 23, was ready for another blow. This was delivered between the Ourcq and Soissons, and threatened the flank of the Germans opposed to Degoutte on the Ourcq. Degoutte's army had been reinforced by the transfer to it of the 42nd American Division from Gouraud, which relieved the 26th, and by the appearance in the front line of the 32nd American Division, which relieved the 3rd, and under this combined pressure from the west and the south the German defence between the Ourcq and the Aisne gradually broke down.

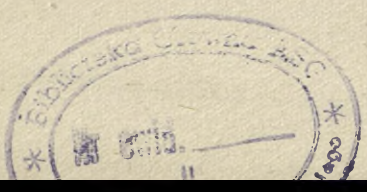
On July 26 the 15th Scottish Division captured Buzancy, east of the main Soissons-Château-Thierry road, and Degoutte was able to enter Fère-en-Tardenois. Then followed two days of fierce German counter-attacks delivered by reinforcements sent southwards by Rupprecht. These attacks were a last attempt by the Germans to hold the north side of the Ourcq valley, and they were broken by the 32nd and 42nd American Divisions. On July 31 the last crisis of the battle was over and the whole valley of the Ourcq had been won by Degoutte.

Ludendorff now found that he was left with no

* The 51st was the Highland Territorial division, the 62nd the West Yorkshire Territorials, the 15th a Scottish division of the "second hundred thousand," the 34th had been reformed of battalions from Palestine.

leisure to restore his lines of supply, that the salient was daily getting narrower, and that congestion and confusion within it left him no alternative but to come out of it altogether. Accordingly, he retreated behind the Vesle and Aisne, pressed on all sides by the Allied forces, which had been strengthened by the 77th American Division. The Germans got across the rivers in the first days of August. Paris was relieved of the menace which had hung over her for six weeks, and a second time the Marne had proved fatal to German hopes. It is one of the remarkable coincidences of the war that twice, confident of victory, the Germans should have crossed the Marne, neglecting to protect their right flank, and that twice a blow against that neglected flank should have brought their offensives to ruin. It is little less remarkable that in the first battle of the Marne the first five divisions of the British army, crossing the river near Château-Thierry, in their first offensive campaign after the retreat from Mons, should have advanced north-eastwards through Oulchy-le-Château and Fère-en-Tardenois to the Vesle and the Aisne, and that the first American divisions to take part in an offensive battle should have traversed exactly the same ground.

The Germans behind the Vesle and the Aisne were posted in strong positions; by withdrawing from the salient they had extricated themselves from the difficulties in which Mangin's blow at Soissons had placed them and were ready to put up a strong resist-



ance. Foch thereupon tossed the ball to Sir Douglas Haig, who, on August 8, attacked the enemy on the Amiens front. In the battle of Amiens the 3rd British Corps, with which was a regiment of the 33rd American Division, the Australian and the Canadian Corps, belonging to the Fourth British Army under Sir Henry Rawlinson, attacked the western face of the great salient, which the Germans had driven into our front in March, on a front of about eleven miles, while the First French Army, commanded by General Debeney and placed by Foch under Haig's orders, prolonged the front of battle by about four miles to the south.

The plan of attack, like Mangin's, was based on the experience gained at Hamel and on what we had learned from Ludendorff's methods in the battle of March 21. I have described how, on that day, the Germans opened a sudden and intense bombardment from a mass of guns brought up secretly at the last moment, and how they profited from the heavy fog which enveloped the battlefield. In the early years of the war fog or bad weather of any kind had been regarded as a fatal obstacle to successful attack, because it blinded the gunners and prevented them from creating the breach for the infantry assault. Time and again in the early days of trench warfare, when the Germans were firing five shells to our one, a day of fog had been hailed by our infantry with joy as a day

of rest and of relief from shell-fire. Time and again attacks planned by us and by our French Allies were postponed because the weather conditions made it difficult, or even impossible, for the artillery to ascertain by preliminary trial the exact adjustment of their guns needed for the bombardment of the targets allotted to them. This process of registration of targets had been regarded as an indispensable preliminary of battle, and when a great mass of guns was to be employed it was a slow and elaborate business. Time and again it had given us warning of the enemy's intention to attack and had warned the enemy that we were preparing to attack him; it was one of the factors which had made it all but impossible to achieve surprise. But by 1918 the development of scientific gunnery had made it possible to ascertain for the gunners beforehand the exact adjustment required to enable them to reach any given target under any reasonable conditions of weather. So the slow process of registration became unnecessary. It was possible to open a great bombardment without previously alarming the enemy, and, best of all, the attackers became far more independent of the weather than they had ever been. Fog became an aid instead of an impediment to attack, because, under its protection, guns, tanks and infantry could be massed unseen.

So for this battle of August 8 two thousand guns were collected on Rawlinson's front of attack, many of them being brought into action at the last

moment, and hardly any had opened fire from their new positions before they all crashed out together. A friendly mist covered the final assembly of the assaulting troops and of the tanks, and these burst through the enemy's lines almost simultaneously with the opening of the bombardment which rolled on ahead of them in the form of a crushing barrage. In no battle of the war was the power of the tank better displayed. The tank of the summer of 1918 was, in speed, ability to overcome obstacles and turn quickly in any direction, a vastly improved machine from that of the Somme battle of 1916. About two hundred of these were employed in the first line, with as many more in support, and they not only during the battle drove avenues for the advance of the infantry through the German defences, overcame their nests of machine-guns and spread demoralisation in the German ranks, but, by thus relieving the artillery of many of the complicated tasks which had formerly fallen to them in helping the infantry forward, they also helped the process of simplifying and speeding up the preparations for battle.

Haig's first orders to Rawlinson to prepare for battle went out on July 13, a little over three weeks before the attack, while the preliminaries for the great attacks, which in former years had begun with days of shelling, had taken months. It had in these circumstances been impossible to keep secret from the army what was intended. Talk of the " next push "

went on in every mess, and as sick, wounded and men on leave came home items of information were pieced together. So London usually had beforehand a very fair idea of what was afoot, and we may be reasonably certain that what was known in England was also known at the enemy's headquarters. But the speed with which the battle of Amiens was prepared made it much easier to preserve secrecy, and the army had very little notion of what Haig and Rawlinson were planning. The men of the Canadian Corps who were brought down from Arras at the last moment had no idea where they were going. Their hospitals had been sent north into Flanders, and the most circumstantial reports were in circulation that the Canadians were going to join Plumer for a great attack on the Ypres front. Canadian battalions were put into the line on the Kemmel front, where they were identified by the enemy. Even King Albert was deceived, and inquired indignantly why he had not been told of this offensive which was about to take place on his right. There were no rumours to attract the enemy's attention towards Amiens and many to draw it elsewhere.

The result was that Rawlinson sprang an even more complete surprise upon the enemy than had Byng at Cambrai. The tanks, lumbering forward through the mist, were through the German defences and amongst the troops in the fields and billets behind before they were aware that any attack had taken place. The headquarters of divisions, and

even in one case of a corps, were surprised, and the tanks did invaluable service in cutting the German telegraph and telephone communications. One of our whippets, on the first morning, got through to a depth of more than six miles behind the front and, though quite alone, succeeded in causing rare havoc to the German wires before it was surrounded and its occupants were forced to surrender. The cavalry, following hard after the tanks, made many captures and completed the demoralisation of the enemy. Owing to the disorganisation of their means of communication and the difficulty which the German generals had in ascertaining what was happening and in sending out their orders, control for a time broke down, and this, in conjunction with the alarm spread by our tanks, seriously affected the *moral* of the German troops. Ludendorff says that "August 8 was the black day in the history of the German army," and Colonel Bauer, the head of Ludendorff's artillery section at headquarters, in his account of the negotiations between his chief and the German Government, speaks of "the events of the inglorious eighth of August." The work begun at Hamel was completed, and the moral ascendancy established by tanks, artillery and infantry working in combination affected both private and general in the German army. By August 10 the Australians and Canadians had, with the help of the Cavalry Corps, broken through the German lines to a depth of twelve miles.

North of the Somme the 3rd Corps had had a harder struggle, for the enemy there was on the alert, the surprise was not complete and the nature of the ground made it impossible to use tanks; but none the less the greater part of the ridge dividing the Ancre south of Albert from the Somme was gained. Twenty German divisions were defeated by thirteen British infantry divisions, three British cavalry divisions, and an American infantry regiment, and nearly twenty-two thousand prisoners and four hundred guns were captured. The immediate effect of the advance of the Australians and Canadians south of the Somme was very similar to that of Mangin's blow at Soissons. The Germans were deprived of the use of the railways passing through Chaulnes, which had supplied their troops between the Somme and the Oise, and had to carry through another withdrawal. Debeney, who was not aided by tanks to the same extent as we were, at first made slower progress than did the Canadians on his left, but as the difficulties of the Germans increased, owing to the threat of the Canadian attack to their communications, not only was Debeney able to press forward towards Roye, but Humbert, on his right, joined in and drove the enemy back from the Lassigny plateau, which had been won by von Hutier in June, so that by the middle of August the Germans between the Somme and the Oise were almost everywhere back in

the lines which they had held in the summer of 1916. Then, in accordance with the theory of limited punches, the attack was stayed. The Amiens salient had disappeared, as had the Marne salient, and the main lines of railway through Amiens, which the enemy had dominated since the end of March and which were the main channels of communication between the French and British armies, were cleared.

No sooner was Humbert established on the Lassigny plateau, and the battle front on the Amiens salient for the time being at a standstill, than Mangin, on Humbert's right, opened an attack between the Oise and the Aisne at Soissons. Mangin began on the 18th with a local operation which sent the Germans back into their battle positions, but did not alarm von Boehn sufficiently to cause him to send up reserves, of which he had none too many. Von Boehn had just assumed command of the armies which had hitherto constituted the German Crown Prince's right, in order that that young gentleman might be better able to devote his attention to the reorganisation of his centre after the buffeting it had received in the second battle of the Marne. Von Boehn's front extended from Soissons to Albert, and he was anxiously watching Haig. He did not, therefore, wish to send off troops prematurely to his left, and Mangin caught him napping. On the 19th Mangin extended his front of attack, and by the 20th had gained possession of the whole of the heights between

the Oise and the Aisne, having captured 8,000 prisoners and 200 guns.

Foch's system of manœuvre was now in action, and it is worth while again pausing for a moment to compare his quick rapier thrusts with Ludendorff's heavier and slower sword play. It will be remembered that Ludendorff's attacks on the British front, begun on March 21, had ended on April 29 with the repulse between Bailleul and Ypres. Then ensued a pause of twenty-seven days, for the third battle of the Aisne did not begin until May 27. This ended on June 2, and was followed after a week's interval by von Hutier's attempt to reach Compiègne, which was stopped on June 13. It was not until July 15, thirty-two days later, that the Crown Prince was ready to begin the second battle of the Marne, and each of these respites which Ludendorff had allowed the Allies made his next task the more difficult. Now see how Foch, who had not the superiority in numbers which Ludendorff had had in the spring, gave his adversary no time to recover. He makes his counter-attack on July 18, and the second battle of the Marne ends with the Germans behind the Aisne and the Vesle on August 6. On August 8 Haig opens the battle of Amiens, and on the 12th it ends with the Germans in their lines about Chaulnes. Meanwhile, on the 9th, Humbert has already begun the battle of Lassigny, which comes to an end on the 16th, and

from the 17th to the 20th Mangin is driving the Germans from the Aisne heights. As soon as he stops, Byng, on August 21, begins the battle of Bapaume; but ere that Foch's strategy had effected a vital change in the enemy's plans.

Haig's victory of Amiens gave rise to anxious debates at German Headquarters. The blow had been utterly unexpected, and the revelation that the British army had so quickly recovered its fighting power came as a great shock. Ludendorff was so overwhelmed that he tendered his resignation, which was refused. He has stated that Haig's victory had convinced him that there was no longer any hope of German victory, and he at once advised his Government to seek the best terms which they could obtain from their enemies.* On August 14 a conference was held at Great Headquarters at which both the Chancellor and the Foreign Minister were present, and over which the Emperor presided. Ludendorff then expounded his views on the military situation, and declared that, while the army could still for a time present a strong front, the military situation could never be better than it then was. He urged that the best course for Germany was to propose terms while she still occupied large stretches of the territory of her enemies and while the process of driving the German troops out of them was likely to prove long and costly. Such a change of front, coming so soon after the

* Ludendorff, pp. 551 *et seq.*

promises of victory which on Ludendorff's authority had been held out to Germany, filled the German statesmen with dismay. It was held that to undeceive the people so bluntly and brutally was politically impossible, and the negotiations which resulted in Prince Max of Baden becoming Chancellor were set on foot.

While the Emperor and his advisers were thus seeking for a way out of their difficulties Ludendorff changed his military policy. His purpose was now to stand on the defensive, to avoid exposing his troops to any more such defeats as he had recently suffered, and to present a barrier to the Allies which they would hesitate to attack. He had had again to draw heavily upon Rupprecht's reserves to stop the hole caused by the collapse of his defence in the Amiens salient, and it had become imperative that he should economise troops somehow. He therefore decided on a general shortening of his front. He began to draw out of the salient he had made in Flanders in April, and attempted to follow this by a repetition of the manœuvre which had been so successful at the beginning of 1917. Then he had upset General Nivelle's plan by a withdrawal into the Hindenburg line, and now he proposed to retire slowly over the same ground to the shelter of the same vast system of defences, in which he hoped to stand until a peace not unfavourable to Germany had been concluded. As in 1917, he wished

this retirement to be deliberate and to cause us the maximum of delay and inconvenience. It would have suited him admirably to have completed the movement about the time when the weather broke in the late autumn. We would then have been left without shelter in the desert of the old Somme battlefields, while his troops were established in the elaborate dug-outs of the Hindenburg system or billeted in the intact towns and villages to the east of it. Fortunately, Haig divined this scheme. At this time the Hindenburg line ran much nearer to our front between Albert and Arras than it did in the Somme valley, and Haig proposed to upset Ludendorff's plan of retreat, to force him out of the Somme uplands and turn the line of the river from Péronne southwards, by striking from the Albert-Arras front through Bapaume towards the nearest portion of Ludendorff's goal.

On the eve of the battle of Bapaume, which, as I have said, began on August 21, Haig issued an order to his troops which, while hinting at the probability of a German withdrawal, called their attention to the great change which had been wrought by the victories of the Marne and of Amiens, and asked for their greatest efforts in pressing back the enemy wherever he gave way. The brunt of this new battle fell upon Byng's Third Army, which had the task of pressing in north of the Ancre towards Bapaume, while Rawlinson's Fourth Army co-operated on its

right by advancing astride the Somme on Péronne. By the evening of the 21st the success of Haig's plan was practically assured by Byng, who gained the line of the Albert—Arras railway. The consequence was that, when on the 23rd a general attack on the whole front of the Third and Fourth Armies followed, the German defence north of the Somme gave way, and the Thiépval Ridge, Pozières, Courcelette, Martinpuich and Miraumont fell in rapid succession to Byng's men. The effect of this upon our men was electric. In 1916 the capture of each of these places had cost us a long, slow, bloody struggle, and the prime manhood of our new armies lay buried thick around them. They are names as sacred to the National Army of Great Britain as Minden, Salamanca, Waterloo and the Alma are to the old Regular Army. They had been yielded in March in sorrow and pain after a noble defence against odds. Now, in a few hours and at comparatively small cost, the same regiments which had perforce retreated from them with heavy hearts had once more thrown the enemy back from this sacred soil. No one who has not tasted the bitterness of retreat can appreciate the full thrill of an advance over ground made familiar by victory and defeat. Times had indeed changed from the days of the first battle of the Somme. The army was from long experience suspicious of announcements from Headquarters which foretold the collapse of the enemy. Too often these had come

to men who had seen them falsified by a stubborn and skilful foe, but now Haig was clearly right. The day had come to strike swiftly and boldly, and with new confidence in themselves and in their chief our men pressed forward across the horrid desolation created by Hun savagery and by the still more terrible ebb and flow of war.

The Germans strove hard to gain time to carry through the ordered retreat which they had planned, their machine-gunners in particular fighting with that devotion which marked them throughout the war; but we had now found the answer to the German machine-gun, and one hundred tanks had been sent by Haig into the battle to help the infantry forward. By August 26 Byng's progress in the north had, as Haig had expected, begun to cause the Germans great anxiety for the safety of their troops between the Somme and the Oise, and these too retreated, followed by Rawlinson's Fourth Army and the French armies under Debeney and Humbert. By the night of the 29th Rawlinson's men had reached the left bank of the Somme opposite Péronne, Debeney had hustled the Germans through Nesle, and Humbert had occupied Noyon. On this same day the Germans evacuated Bapaume, which Byng was encircling from the north and south, and were driven completely from the Somme plateau. The battle was brought to a noble close by one of the most brilliant feats of arms of the whole war.

While Byng had been closing in on Bapaume the Australian Corps had been steadily pushing the Germans back up the Somme towards Péronne, and in the early hours of August 31 the 5th Australian Brigade, having crossed the river on improvised bridges and worked their way towards Mont St. Quentin, surprised the German defenders of that hill, which dominates Péronne, and carried it by assault. As the result of this achievement the Australians were able to enter Péronne the following day, and the German defences along the Somme as far south as Ham were turned. In the battle of Bapaume thirty-five German divisions had been driven in ten days across the scene of the struggle which in 1916 had lasted from July 1 until November 17, and they had lost 34,000 prisoners and 270 guns. Ludendorff's retreat, far from enabling him to economise troops, was exhausting his dwindling resources as rapidly as a battle accepted voluntarily.

While the battle of Bapaume was in progress Haig had been quietly transferring the Canadian Corps from the Amiens battlefield back to Arras, whence it had come, and on August 26 the 2nd and 3rd Canadian Divisions, with the 51st British Division, which had been moved north from the Marne, attacked east of Arras and captured the important hill of Monchy le Preux. Horne's First Army, to which these divisions belonged, followed up

this success by driving the enemy back into the northern extension of the Hindenburg line, known as the Drocourt-Quéant switch. This Drocourt line had been completed by the enemy after the battle of Arras, in April, 1917, and for eighteen months he had been hard at work improving it until it had become almost as formidable as the main Hindenburg line, with which it connected at Quéant. It was assaulted in the morning of September 2 by the 1st and 4th Canadian Divisions and the 4th, 52nd, 57th and 63rd British Divisions, assisted by some forty tanks. These six divisions not only broke clear through the network of German defences and gained possession of the whole system in less than seven hours, but in doing so they routed nine German divisions, who had all the advantage of defensive works which they knew thoroughly and believed to be impregnable. This great feat had, as Haig had hoped it would, far-reaching results. With their right flank threatened, the Germans south of Quéant had to hurry back to the shelter of the Hindenburg line, and by September 9 they were back in the outpost positions in front of their main defensive system. On September 6 the French occupied Ham, on the Somme, and Chauny, on the Oise, and a few days later were within sight of La Fère. Haig's manœuvre had the simultaneous effect of hastening the German withdrawal in Flanders, and by September 6 we had reoccupied Bailleul and Merville and

were back in Neuve Chapelle, while the 27th American Division had passed beyond Kemmel Hill. Thus in one month all the ground won by Ludendorff in his first two attacks of March and April had, with the exception of a portion on the Ypres front, been regained, and the British army had amply avenged the reverses of the spring.

The two German attempts to derange the plans of the Allies by a retreat into the Hindenburg line had had very different results. In 1917 we did not discover what they were at until their preparations had been completed. Their retreat then lasted almost exactly three months, and during those three months we fought the battle of Arras, in which the Canadians stormed the Vimy Ridge. That was the most conspicuous success we had gained up to that time on the Western front, and, including our captures in that victory, we, in those three months, secured about 21,000 prisoners and 220 guns, an achievement of which we were at the time rightly very proud. In 1918, when Ludendorff again tried to escape from his embarrassments by a similar retreat, we drove the Germans back over almost exactly the same distance between August 21 and September 9—that is, in twenty days—and in that time we captured 53,000 prisoners and 470 guns. Ludendorff could no longer retreat according to plan.

While Haig was hunting the Germans back into the Hindenburg line Pershing was engaged in collect-

ing his scattered divisions, in forming them into the First American Army, of which he assumed personal command, and in establishing an American sector of the front. This by the end of August extended round the St. Mihiel salient northwards to a point opposite Verdun. The St. Mihiel salient was a relic of the first German offensive of 1914. In an attempt to break through to the south of Verdun the enemy had in September of that year gained possession of a portion of the heights of the Meuse, including the Fort of the Roman Camp and the little town of St. Mihiel on the river below it. The heights of the Meuse were part of the defensive system of the eastern frontier of France, and along them had been constructed a chain of forts connecting the fortresses of Verdun and Toul, of which the Fort of the Roman Camp was one. Though on the map the St. Mihiel salient looked to be a narrow wedge which could be swept by shell fire from both flanks, in reality the wooded heights afforded the enemy splendid shelter and gave him commanding positions of exceptional strength which dominated all the approaches. In 1915 Joffre had tried again and again to drive the Germans out, and both Les Eparges, on the north-west corner of the salient, and Apremont, on its southern face, became names of ill-omen in the French army. Thereafter the French left the salient alone, and it became a quiet sector of the front.

In September, 1918, the St. Mihiel salient

was held by nine German and Austrian divisions, of whom six were second-class troops. Ludendorff had decided to withdraw to the base of the salient in order to economise troops, and some of the German heavy artillery had been removed before the Americans attacked. Probably the enemy relied upon the strength of his position and upon the ease with which he could observe all preparations for attack to enable him to make a leisurely retirement at the proper moment. If this is so, he was surprised by the method and swiftness of the American advance, which began on September 12. The main attack was made by the 1st Corps of four divisions and the 4th Corps of three divisions against the southern face of the salient, and was directed northwards so as to cut in east of the heights of the Meuse. Simultaneously the 5th American Corps attacked with two divisions on the north-western front of the salient and drove in eastwards towards the southern attack. One French division attacked on the left of the 5th Corps, and two more connected the 5th Corps round the nose of the salient at St. Mihiel with the main attack. The battle opened with a four hours' bombardment, and then, at five in the morning, the American infantry advanced behind their barrage. Either because the *moral* of the German troops was not good or because they knew that it had been planned to come out of the salient, the resistance was on the

whole feeble, and in thirty hours the two American attacking forces had joined hands and the salient had been wiped out with astonishingly little loss. The whole operation was carried through according to programme. It was not necessary to employ any of the American reserve divisions, of which six were in readiness, and, as will be seen, they were at once available to begin preparations for another and more formidable task. The battle resulted in the capture by the First American Army of 16,000 prisoners and 443 guns.

The St. Mihiel salient had long broken up the stretch of front between the Moselle and Verdun, so that any considerable offensive movement by the French into Lorraine had been impossible. The front was equally unpromising from the German point of view for an attack directed against Nancy. The result of this was that this portion of the long line had, after the failure of Joffre's attempts in 1915 to reduce the salient, become dormant and had been very lightly held by both sides. But now that the salient was gone and the front had been straightened out, the Germans found their great fortress of Metz menaced with attack, and also the French iron fields of Briey, to the north of Metz, which they had captured in the early days of the war, and were of even more importance to them than the fortress. American Headquarters allowed it to be whispered in confidence that Pershing's real objective was these

iron fields, and doubtless some of these whispers found their way into the German lines. In any event Ludendorff, almost to the very end, showed his nervousness as to an American attack on the east bank of the Meuse, and, hard up as he was for reserves, he kept troops to watch for an attack which did not begin to develop until the German plenipotentiaries were on their way to sign the Armistice.

This victory of Pershing's completed the series of preliminary punches, and Foch was now ready for the knock-out blow. His immediate object had been to free Paris and Amiens and to clear the strategic railways which he needed for the free movement of his troops; his ultimate object had been to prepare for a decisive victory by exhausting the German reserves. We have seen how he achieved the first; let us now see how he stood as to the second.

At the end of May, just before the Crown Prince William's attack on the Chemin des Dames, the German forces in the West had reached their greatest strength. They then had 207 divisions on the Western front, and of these about 66 divisions fit to take part in battle were in reserve. In the third week of September, after Pershing's victory at St. Mihiel, the number of German divisions had fallen to 185, for in order to make good his heavy losses Ludendorff, whose income in man power from Germany was quite insufficient to meet expenditure, had been compelled to draw upon his capital, and to

break up 22 of his divisions in an endeavour to keep the remainder up to strength. Two more divisions were on their way across from Russia and six others were placed under orders to move, but of these, three had to be diverted to help Mackensen in the Balkans out of difficulties in which he was placed by the collapse of Bulgaria, and none of the remainder reached the front in France before the great battle was joined, and they were, moreover, of poor quality, for all their best men had been taken from them to meet the never-ending call for drafts for the Western front. Even these drastic measures proved insufficient, and none of Ludendorff's divisions had its full establishment of men, so he had to swallow his pride and appeal to despised Austria for aid, with the result that six Austrian divisions arrived on the Western front, and of these two had been defeated at St. Mihiel. The reserve of 61 rested and fit divisions in May had fallen to 21 in September, and there were available to swell it only the five divisions coming from Russia.

As I have already pointed out, this weakening of the German armies had not been due solely to Foch's skill. In part it was the consequence of Ludendorff's mistake in his spring campaign of compromising between the policy of a succession of attacks intended to prepare for a great final effort and the policy of attempting to break through in one great battle. He failed in the first by continuing his assaults beyond

the period when he was inflicting more loss than he suffered, and he failed in the second because he would not or could not continue them to the point where decisive success was obtainable, and in acting as he did he sapped his strength. Still more was the exhaustion of Germany's man power the fruit of the Allied efforts during the previous years. It is easy in the light of after knowledge to criticise the Allied generals and to say that their methods were wasteful of life. Certainly if they had known in 1915 what they knew in 1918 their procedure would have been different and the war would have been over sooner; but that criticism is best answered by the fact that the man who is to-day universally recognised as the outstanding figure of the war was himself engaged in doing that to which the critics object.

It is commonly asserted that the Allies should have remained on the defensive in the West in 1915. That argument overlooks the fact that it was always present in Joffre's mind that the Germans might at any time elect to do the very thing which they came so near achieving in March, 1918. I believe it to have been one of the greatest of the many German blunders that they did not attack in force in the West in 1915, before our new armies were ready and our munition factories had become really productive. In 1916 Verdun was saved because we were able to extend our front to the Somme and free a great number of French troops; an attack made before we

were in a position to bring such help to our Allies might have had very different results. The one means of averting that danger was to take every opportunity of making the Western front more secure by pushing back the German lines and of exhausting the military power of Germany. Here lies the root of the long barren controversy which raged between the "Easterners" and "Westerners" throughout the greater part of the war. It was necessary to be safe in the East in order to be strong in the West, but it was at no time possible before the summer of 1918 to make the West safe by success in the East, because the Allies had not the force necessary to protect their vitals in the West against possible danger and at the same time carry through a decisive campaign in more distant fields. Therefore the policy of seizing every favourable opportunity of exhausting Germany's military power by attack in the West was the right policy if the methods followed were not always the best. It was that policy which emptied the depôts in Germany, and though it came near to emptying both our own and the French depôts, it had its reward in 1918, for without it neither could Foch's skill in two short months have materially reduced the enemy's strength nor could American aid have enabled us to win when we did win.

While the German strength had been going steadily down, the Allied strength had been going

steadily up. Between the middle of July and the beginning of August nine American divisions took part in the second battle of the Marne, and there were then three more on the British front, which had practically completed their training for battle. Pershing at the battle of St. Mihiel had fourteen divisions in action or in reserve, while at that time there were two on the British front and nine more almost ready—twenty-five American divisions in all—upon which Foch could reckon at once, and more to come, each of these divisions being about twice the strength of a British, French or German division. The British army, which in July could only bring into the field fifty-three divisions, in September had, thanks to the arrival of reinforcements from other theatres of war, grown to fifty-nine divisions, two of which were, however, still in process of reorganisation. Thus, while the fighting strength of the Germans and Austrians in the West had fallen by sixteen divisions since Foch had delivered his first punch, that of the Allies had increased by the equivalent of about thirty-two, counting one American division as equal to two German divisions.

Since July 18 the Allies had captured more than 2,000 German guns and large stocks of shell, while the blockade, on which we had founded so many premature hopes, was at last beginning to have results directly bearing on the military situation, and made it increasingly difficult for the Germans to

replace their lost and damaged war material. For example, the mechanism of the German guns necessitated the use of brass cartridge cases, but by this time the supply of brass and copper had run very low, and the most elaborate and tyrannical system of perquisition could extract no more from the occupied territories, so that inferior substitutes had to be used. The power and efficiency of the German artillery was diminishing as fast as the strength of their battalions, while the Allied guns had gone up from about 18,000 in May to 21,000 in September, and they had almost unlimited supplies of munitions.

But it was not in numbers and material alone that the Allies had gained. The German soldiers who had been sent over from Russia had come into touch with Bolshevist theory and practice. They had seen soldiers' committees in control, and officers degraded and insulted, and it began to occur to them that the iron discipline under which they had been brought up had not behind it the power which they had imagined was there. They infected their comrades with a distrust and suspicion of authority which spread rapidly as defeat followed on defeat and the promise of a speedy and victorious peace became a mockery. On the other side of the wire the success of Foch's strategy had filled France with joyful relief and inspired the Allied troops with confidence. The work begun at Doullens on March 26 was completed, and for the first time

in the war a real sense of corporate unity pervaded the ranks. The British army, having made one of the most marvellous recoveries in the history of war, was sure of its superiority, individual and collective, over the enemy. The grim, determined, stolid endurance of the spring had been changed by the series of victories which began with the battle of Amiens into eager, irresistible enthusiasm. The second battle of the Marne had taught the Allied leaders that the untried American troops could fight and win with far less training than they had calculated to be necessary; the victory of St. Mihiel had shown that an American army could take the field as an entity. Every one of the data upon which Ludendorff had based the plan for the *Friedensturm* had been proved to be false. The spirit of France was as high as ever; the British army, far from being exhausted, had struck hard and often and with conspicuous success; the Americans were not only present in numbers, but had taught the Germans to fear their dash, skill and valour.

CHAPTER IV

ARMAGEDDON

The Hindenburg Line—The American Battle of the Meuse-Argonne — Gouraud in Champagne — Haig Breaks the Hindenburg Line—King Albert's Advance into Belgium—The Result of Armageddon.

Foch, having prepared the way for his decisive thrust by his series of preliminary punches, was about to launch the Allied armies against the most formidable of all the German defences. The name "Hindenburg Line" originated with the British soldiers, who so entitled the great system of German works which had been discovered towards the end of 1916 behind the Somme battlefield.

At the end of August, 1916, when Hindenburg and Ludendorff first arrived at Great Headquarters, the German military situation was by no means rosy. Russia was still formidable, the Austrian army required a great deal of support, Roumania was about to enter the field, the Verdun offensive had proved to be a disastrous failure, the British army had grown to formidable dimensions, and the Franco-British attacks on the Somme were pressing the Germans hard and eating up their reserves. Ludendorff wished first to finish off Russia

and Roumania, and in order to do this he had to make the situation in the West safe and to be able to economise troops there. The only way in which he could do this effectively was by shortening his front. He could not give up any ground in Belgium without endangering his hold upon Ostend and Zeebrugge, which were invaluable as bases from which submarines and destroyers could attack the British communications across the Channel, while the country about Bruges and Ghent gave him an excellent jumping-off place for aeroplane raids upon London and the south-east of England. He did not wish to abandon Lille, because great pains had been taken to fortify the place, which had become the northern pivot of the German defensive system, while the great manufacturing district surrounding the town was of the utmost value. Nor did he wish to come away from the Vimy Ridge, for it covered a great part of the Lens coal fields, and in the hands of the Allies would be a strong barrier against a German offensive when he was ready to attack in the West. West of Laon the St. Gobain massif formed a pivot for his centre, which it was important to hold. Between Reims and Verdun a withdrawal would not shorten his front, and would bring his enemy dangerously near the railway which connected Metz with Sedan and Mézières, part of his main lateral line of communications. In the east he could not give ground without exposing Metz to bombard-

ment and Alsace and Lorraine to invasion. Between the Vimy Ridge and the St. Gobain massif, however, his front formed a great arc, into which the French and British had bitten deep during the battle of the Somme. By coming out of this arc he would shorten his front, get his troops out of an embarrassing position, and would be yielding French territory which was of no special value to him. Accordingly he determined to construct a chord for the arc, and to draw back to the chord in his own time. So the Hindenburg line was begun.

The original section of the Hindenburg line started just east of Arras, where it connected with the defences of the Vimy Ridge and ran south-eastwards to the Canal du Nord, eight miles west of Cambrai; thence it followed an almost north and south line past the western outskirts of St. Quentin, through La Fère, to the St. Gobain massif. It was this portion of the line which leaped into fame when Ludendorff carried out his withdrawal in the early months of 1917. He had realised that he would be attacked again on the Western front in the spring of that year, and that his armies between the Oise and the Scarpe were, as the result of the battle of the Somme, in no condition to meet attack. He tells us that there was no alternative to withdrawal.* Having completed his defences, he slowly brought back the bulk of his troops and material, leaving only

* Ludendorff, p. 322.

rearguards in his front line. He then proceeded to lay waste systematically the country he intended to abandon. Every article of value was removed from the French towns and villages, all the able-bodied inhabitants were deported, and most of those who were too young, too old or too feeble to be of service were collected in two or three centres to be rescued by the Allies when they advanced. The trees were cut down, not even the orchards being spared, the villages were set on fire, the towns were gutted, explosives being used for the more solid buildings which fire could not damage sufficiently, the wells were fouled, every road and railway bridge was destroyed, the railway embankments were blown in, the rails were torn up, and mines were exploded under every cross-roads, making craters which effectively barred wheeled traffic. As a last refinement a series of devilishly cunning booby traps was devised, consisting of wires connected to German helmets, pianos, door-handles, the steps of dug-outs or of houses, which when touched exploded charges and cost us the lives of many of our men. The systematic and skilful savagery of the modern German created a devastation which shamed the best efforts of his untutored forbears. This was all part of Ludendorff's scheme of defence. He knew that the time and labour required to restore the communications, to repair the bridges, and provide water and shelter for their troops would derange the plans of the

Allied generals, and as a purely military measure the scheme was an unqualified success. Nivelle had intended that one of his attacks should be made against the southern part of the front from which the Germans had retired, and he had no time to prepare properly for another to take its place, with the result that his attempt on St. Quentin was repulsed, while Ludendorff, by shortening his front, obtained the reserves necessary to meet and check the main French attack on the Aisne. Only the British part of Nivelle's campaign met with any considerable measure of success, and in the battle of Arras a part of the Arras arm of the Hindenburg line was rolled up.

Before the battle of Arras started the Germans had begun to prepare for the possibility of the capture of the Vimy Ridge by digging a northern extension of the Hindenburg line, which ran from Quéant, ten miles west of Cambrai, and then northwards through Drocourt and east of Lens to the southern defences of Lille. This was the line known to the British army as "the Drocourt-Quéant switch," and broken by them on September 2, 1918. It was the beginning of a vast extension of the Hindenburg system carried out throughout 1917, during the whole of which year the Germans were on the defensive. Lille and Metz became the main pivots of this extended system. The term "line" as applied to it is a misnomer, for nowhere did it

consist of a single line of trenches. It was composed of a whole series of trench lines enclosing a heavily fortified area many miles in depth. The Germans, to mark their sense of its importance, named its various sections after the heroes of German mythology.* The Drocourt switch they called the "Wotan position"; the section covering Cambrai and St. Quentin, the "Siegfried position"; that south of St. Quentin and west of Laon, the "Alberich position"; behind the Champagne front came the "Brunehild position"; and the southernmost positions, which ran east of the Argonne to the Meuse and thence to Metz, were called the "Kriemhilde and Michel positions." Thus a great barrier was built up from north to south covering Douai, Cambrai and St. Quentin and protecting the railway connecting Metz with Sedan and Mézières. Of the various sections of this barrier, the Siegfried system in front of Cambrai and St. Quentin, which was begun first, was the most elaborate; the Kriemhilde section had not the same depth, partly because the ground on the Meuse-Argonne front was naturally very defensible, and the approaches to the Kriemhilde line were more difficult than those leading to other sections, and partly because the original German trenches between the Meuse and the Argonne were never penetrated by Allied troops from the first days of trench warfare

* These positions are shown on Map II.

until they were stormed by the First American Army on September 26, 1918.

The principles on which these lines were elaborated were worked out by the Germans as the result of a close study of their experiences in the first battle of the Somme. If that battle cost us dear, it and the battle of Verdun destroyed the flower of the Germany army, and it became evident to the German leaders that a few more such struggles would exhaust their military strength. By the summer of 1916 the work of Mr. Lloyd George at the British Ministry of Munitions and of M. Albert Thomas at the French Ministry had begun to take effect. For the first time in the war the Allies on the Western front were superior to the Germans in gun power and in the number of shells at the service of the guns. The bombardment preliminary to the infantry attack by the British in the Somme battle lasted seven days, and was heard in the suburbs of London, 150 miles away. The Germans realised that at this period of the war bombardment had become the principal means of attack by the Allies, and that their strongest trenches would crumble to pieces if exposed to the full blast of the tornado of shell which could be hurled against them.

Until "sound ranging" was highly developed, which did not take place till later, the accuracy of artillery fire depended upon observation. The guns required eyes, particularly the medium and

heavy guns, which fire from a long distance behind the front lines. Even the best observation from aeroplanes will not replace in a great artillery attack the eyes of an observer on the ground connected by telephone with the guns. The Germans therefore designed the Hindenburg lines so that observation of them from the ground should be as difficult as possible. Whenever it could be done, they were constructed along the back slopes of ridges, not along the top or on the front slopes, where they would be easily seen. In order to keep the observers and the guns at a distance, and to disorganise the attacking infantry, strong outpost positions were built often as much as three or four miles in front of the main positions. The troops in these outpost positions were intended to fall back before a heavy attack, after delaying it as much as possible by machine-gun and rifle fire, and with this method of defence it would not be necessary to keep large numbers of troops in the very front lines, which would be exposed to the worst of the bombardment. This was, in fact, an early version of the system of defence which Gouraud applied so brilliantly when he defeated the great German attack of July 15, 1918.*

* This was the system of defence when strong lines were in existence as battle positions. When the battle positions were pierced, it was usually necessary to dispute every yard of ground. The outpost system was abandoned by the Germans in the later stages of the third battle of Ypres and in September, 1918, and by us on the front of the Fifth Army after the German attack of March 31.

In the Siegfried section the system was given great depth, so that if the attackers succeeded in storming the first lines it would be necessary for them to pause until the guns had been brought forward and the stocks of shell brought up for a renewed bombardment of the rear lines. Between Cambrai and St. Quentin the Siegfried system, from the outpost positions near Epehy to the rearmost line near Beaurevoir, was as much as ten miles deep. The most elaborate wire entanglements were provided in front of each line of trenches. They were often arranged in geometrical patterns, so that the angles could be swept by machine-gun fire, and there were, in places, as many as eight or nine belts of barbed wire in front of the trenches. Standing, after the great battle had been won and the Siegfried system had been pierced, on the ridges east of the St. Quentin Canal, in the heart of the system, one looked over miles of dense entanglements running in every direction, and was filled with amazement that it should have been possible for flesh and blood to storm a way through such obstacles. Heavily concreted shelters for the infantry and machine-gunners were provided in the fire trenches, while farther back great underground barracks were constructed at a depth to make them proof against the heaviest bombardment.

When we first broke into the Hindenburg line with Byng's tank attack of November, 1917,

we found that the Germans had hollowed out the ground under many of the villages, piling the chalk into the buildings so that it would not attract attention and would add to the immunity of the dug-out from bombardment. These dug-outs were fitted up on a lavish scale so as to provide for the comforts of the occupants. They were often boarded in and fitted with electric light, while water and sleeping bunks were provided, and they were furnished with numerous stairways, so that the men in them could come out quickly when the bombardment was over.

Through the middle of the Siegfried system ran two canals, the Canal du Nord and the St. Quentin Canal, which near Cambrai becomes the navigable Scheldt. Both of these canals, which run in places through deep cuttings, were used by the enemy, who dug deep into the banks to provide shelter for his men. Between Bellicourt and Vendhuile the St. Quentin Canal ran underground for a distance of 6,000 yards, and this tunnel, when blocked up, provided the Germans with a ready-made underground barrack, which was fitted out for occupation, and connected by numerous shafts with the trenches above. Along the top of the canal, which constituted a very serious natural obstacle, numbers of concreted machine-gun emplacements were built, so that the whole length of the canal where it ran above ground could be swept by cross fire.

Such were the defences upon which the Germans, not without justification, pinned their faith. In keeping with the names bestowed upon them, legends had grown up in Germany as to their extent and strength, and they had therefore acquired great political as well as military importance. While they were intact the German people felt that loss of territory or reverses in the field were not matters of great concern, for at the worst there lay behind these bastions rich provinces of France and the greater part of Belgium, which could be exchanged for favourable terms of peace. The German leaders could still tell us to look at the map. When they were broken the effect both upon leaders and upon people was as overwhelming as it was unexpected.

The Allied defences have often been contrasted unfavourably with these elaborate and intricate German trench systems, but the conditions on the two sides were very different. In the first place, from the beginning of 1915 until the end of 1917 the Allies were, with the exceptions of the German gas attack at Ypres and the battle of Verdun, almost always attacking, devoting all their energies to the attempt to break through the trench barrier, and the vast preparations required for the battles which were fought during that period left little labour over for the elaboration of defences. In the second place, the Germans were much more favourably placed than the Allies as regards labour. They had Russian prisoners

of war in great numbers, and the fact that the Hague Convention forbade the employment of prisoners of war upon military work counted as nothing with them. They were also able to employ forced labour from the populations of Belgium and the occupied districts of Northern France, and with these two sources of supply they could carry out the most extensive works without calling upon the army for more men than were necessary for planning and supervision. The construction of these great defensive systems therefore did not involve the withdrawal of any soldiers from the fighting front, and did not interfere with the rest and training of the troops in war. The Allies, on the other hand, could only provide labour for the construction of rear lines of defence at the expense of their armies, or of the factories in the homeland which provided for the great and ever-growing demands of the armies and fleets, and had to meet the urgent call for more and more ships.

It is quite true that in the first years of the war the German infantryman dug better and worked harder at his trenches than did the British infantryman or his French comrade, but this industry would not have sufficed for the construction of the Hindenburg system, and as time went on and the quality and discipline of the German troops declined the new German trenches, on ground won in attack, which had necessarily to be constructed by the

soldiers, grew less and less formidable. Mangin, in his attack of July 18 in the second battle of the Marne, found little behind the enemy's front line, and Rawlinson had the same experience in the battle of Amiens of August 8. Time and labour made the Hindenburg systems possible.

Those systems had, as I have said, been designed to meet a great bombardment, but by the time Foch was ready to assault them the conditions had altered fundamentally. Bombardment had ceased to be the only or even the chief means at the service of the Allies for opening the road for the infantry attack. The perfected tank was able to break through any belts of barbed wire, however dense, and force its way across any trenches, given reasonably favourable conditions of ground. I do not maintain that tanks alone would have enabled us to break through the Siegfried system, for the two canals formed an obstacle which the tanks could not cross, and the gaps in and between the canals were not sufficiently wide to allow of a really effective breach being made where they occurred. In the battle of Amiens the lessons of Hamel had been applied on a great scale, and with complete success. The triumph of the tanks in that battle had been greatly due to the suddenness and to the power of the bombardment which fell upon the German artillery. Both methods of attack had to be combined, and were combined with rare skill. But it is certain that neither Foch's

skilful preparation for the great battle, nor the valour of the infantry, would have brought us victory if we had had to rely upon bombardment alone in order to batter down the German defences.

The acres of wire entanglement which surrounded the trenches of the Siegfried system would not have been cut without that prolonged artillery preparation which had failed in the past to solve the problem of attack in trench warfare. With the warning which this preparation would have given them the Germans would have been able to shelter their machine-guns and infantry in the vast dug-outs which they had prepared, and have brought them out after the barrage had gone forward. Even when we had tanks they sometimes succeeded in doing this, as the Americans fighting with us on September 29 found to their cost. The tanks were needed not only to clear a way for the infantry through the wire but to crush the enemy's machine-gun nests and keep his men in their underground shelters. Failing this the exhaustion of the enemy's reserves would not have sufficed to give us victory in the great battle, for the German troops holding the line would have been able to break up our attacks without support from behind. The tanks had proved their efficacy in the preparation for Armageddon; now they were to take their part in the culmination towards which Foch had been working, and few things helped us more in the decisive struggle than the moral ascendancy which the success of the

tanks in the preliminary battles had given us over the Germans.

Captured German orders and other documents bear testimony to the dread with which the enemy regarded tanks at this time. Ludendorff had completely changed his views regarding them, and in a circular dealing with the methods of meeting tank attack, he wrote: "Our earlier successes against tanks led to a certain contempt for this weapon of warfare. We must now reckon with more dangerous tanks." A German army order issued after the battle of Amiens said: "The enemy now relies chiefly upon tanks for the success of his attacks. This weapon can only be overcome by the strictest attention to the prescribed counter-measures. I hold all commanders down to company-commanders personally responsible that there is no relaxation at any time in their counter-measures. Specially selected look-out men are to be always in position day and night to give warning of the approach of tanks. Messages regarding the attack by tanks are to be given absolute priority, and are to be sent immediately to the artillery, which is specially detailed to fire upon tanks. All infantry officers must know the exact position of this artillery in their section. An officer is to be appointed in each trench to have charge of the light signals for giving warning in case of tank attack." This is the type of order which is the refuge of authority when caught napping. The German

leaders had delayed too long to study the possibilities of tanks and the most effective means of meeting them. The "counter-measures" presented in this order might have availed against tanks alone; they were useless against tanks, artillery and infantry working in combination. They were, in fact, worse than useless, they were harmful, for they served to demonstrate to the German soldier, who was already in mortal fear of tanks and prepared to make their appearance an excuse for surrender, that his chiefs were as frightened of them as he was, and that they had no effective reply ready.

There are few things more depressing to the men in the ranks, or more calculated to shake their confidence in their leaders, than the knowledge that the enemy possesses a powerful weapon with which they are not provided. We had bitter experience of this in the winter of 1914-1915, when we had to hold the line without the aid of trench mortars, with a totally inadequate supply of hand grenades, and with little support from heavy artillery, with all of which the Germans were well provided. They had no more expected or desired the deadlock of trench warfare than we had, but they had prepared for the siege of fortresses, and had the appliances for siege warfare ready, and we had not. Our men then bore the strain of meeting superior equipment with superhuman endurance, and in 1918 the German troops failed to stand a like test. Their own tanks were few

in number and of inferior design, and their knowledge of our superiority in that weapon had shaken their confidence in the defences before they were attacked. Sooner or later in war an antidote is found to every device of attack or of defence, and the combination of gun and tank proved to be the antidote to the Hindenburg line, while the Germans were not allowed the time to find an antidote to the tank.

The anti-tank gun, on which they had relied after their first experience of the effect of artillery fire upon tanks, had been successfully countered by our barrage. They then invented an anti-tank rifle, firing a heavy armour-piercing bullet, but it had not much success, and towards the end they were producing an anti-tank machine-gun, which might have been more successful, but was in the field too late to receive a fair trial. It would be idle to suppose that no reply to the tank would have been forthcoming had the war gone on longer. All that is certain is that British ingenuity found the answer to the problem presented by German field fortifications before German ingenuity discovered how to overcome the tank.

The general plan for the great battle which was to decide the issue of the war was determined by Foch in consultation with the Allied Commanders-in-Chief before Pershing won the victory of St. Mihiel. That victory served to confirm the Generalissimo in his intentions. As a result of the second battle of the Marne, and of the retreat of the

Germans into the Hindenburg line before the British blows, the German front ran roughly from north to south from the North Sea coast near Nieuport, just east of Ypres, by Armentières, west of Douai, Cambrai and St. Quentin to the River Oise near La Fère. Starting from the Oise it made a big bulge westwards round the St. Gobain Forest along the Oise and the Vesle to Reims, where it again straightened out and ran eastwards through the Champagne heathlands across the Argonne Forest to the Meuse, north-east of Verdun. Behind this front at a distance of about forty-five miles from the British lines opposite Cambrai, and of about twenty miles from the Meuse-Argonne front, ran the main line of railway connecting Metz, Sedan, Mézières, Maubeuge, Mons, and Brussels. This railway line formed the spinal cord of the German defensive system, was Ludendorff's main means of moving his reserves and military stores rapidly from flank to flank, and was his last good line of lateral communication west of the Ardennes.

Foch proposed to strike at this spinal cord from either side of the great bulge in the enemy's line.* The First American Army was to advance between the Meuse and the Argonne upon Sedan, while Gouraud drove in between the Argonne and Reims towards Mézières. This constituted the right wing of the Allied battle front. The intention was that

* The direction of these various attacks is shown on Map I.

Gouraud and the Americans should pinch out the Argonne Forest by advancing on either side of it, for the French had learned by bitter experience what a terrible obstacle the forest presented when defended by the skilled and determined German machine-gunners, who in a country where it was almost impossible to get at them with tanks or with artillery, were in their element. Actually this intention was not realised, and the prolonged stubborn fighting of the American troops through the forest has concentrated attention in the United States upon the struggle in the forest, to such an extent that the battle has come to be popularly known as the battle of the Argonne, but the main American forces were always to the east of the Argonne, and the axis of Pershing's attack ran through Montfaucon to Sedan.

The attack to the north of the bulge was to be made by the First French Army and the First, Third and Fourth British Armies between the Scarpe and the Oise, and was to be directed through St. Quentin and Cambrai towards Maubeuge. It was known that Ludendorff, in his anxiety to protect Cambrai and to secure his precious Hindenburg line, had been weakening his forces in Flanders, and Foch proposed to take advantage of this by making a third attack into Belgium with the Belgian army, reinforced by a portion of Degoutte's army, which had been sent northwards from the Aisne, and the Second British Army. This attack, if successful,

would clear the Belgian coast and threaten the enemy's communication with Germany north of the Ardennes. Foch believed that the two main attacks on either side of the bulge would force the Germans to withdraw from it, and the French armies around the bulge were, while the three attacks were in progress, to keep the enemy in the bulge occupied, and prevent them from retiring at their leisure. The Fifth British Army, which had been reconstituted under the command of General Birdwood, was to carry out a similar rôle on the Lille front between the main British attack on Cambrai and the Flanders attack.

Such was the plan, vast, simple and bold. Now that all is over, and the plan has been brilliantly and completely successful, the courage and determination of the men who formed it and carried it through is apt to be overlooked, more especially as the continuous and rapid succession of victories, which began with the famous counter stroke of July 18, produced in the public mind an exaggerated impression of weakness and even of collapse in the enemy. It seemed as if Foch had brought back the trumpets of Joshua, and that German defences fell before him wherever and whenever he chose to advance. Yet in the third week of September the German resistance was far from broken. If the enemy's infantry had lost much of the dash and initiative which distinguished it in 1916, and the sub-

ordinate leaders had not the skill of their predecessors who had fallen in battle, his artillery, though weakening, was still powerful and well directed, and his machine-guns were manned by picked men of high courage, and had, from long experience, become more formidable than ever. The strongest of the German trench lines still lay in front of the Allies, lines which the enemy believed to be impregnable. Many of the American divisions which were to take part in the battle had had little or no war experience, and the last stages of their training had been hurried through. The American commanders and staffs had had no opportunity of handling such masses of troops as were to be employed, and though St. Mihiel had proved to be a very complete success, it had disclosed defects in the American organisation and staff. It was thought, particularly in the British War Cabinet, that it would be wiser to defer forcing a decision until the American troops had learned more and the American army had increased in size, that the attempt to break through should be postponed until the spring of 1919.

Those who held this view were not without hope that the anticipations which they had long cherished would be realised, and that Germany would collapse when her props were knocked away. One of these props, Bulgaria, was on the point of surrender, and the news both from Austria and from Turkey was

encouraging. It might never be necessary to assault the impenetrable barrier in the West.

Though Foch was in supreme control, his special function was to co-ordinate the strategy of the Allied armies, and the Commanders-in-Chief of those armies remained responsible to their Governments for the lives and wellbeing of their men. It was a question of fighting a battle on a scale which had never yet been attempted, a battle in which millions of soldiers would take part, and hundreds of thousands of lives were at stake. Had Haig and Pershing hesitated, and the arguments in favour of hesitation were many, the great plan could not have been consummated. Haig was, however, confident in himself and in his men. Believing absolutely in their superiority over the Germans, and that no defences could hold them back, he was ready to take on his shoulders the heavy responsibility of deciding to push on at once.

The British Government, while unwilling to veto the plan, felt so doubtful of its success that they were not prepared to support it. Mr. Lloyd George, in daily contact with our difficulties in raising men for the prosecution of the war in all its varied aspects, dreaded the casualty lists of another Somme or Passchendaele, and his sympathies with the theory of victory by the way round were this time more powerful than his courage and his readiness to take risks. Even Foch felt that he could not take the responsibility of ordering the army of another

nation to advance against the serried lines of the Siegfried system. So Haig was left to bear the burden alone. He tells us in his dispatch of January 7, 1919, how he took it up. After describing the broad lines of Foch's plans and of the attacks to be carried out by the Allied armies, he goes on: "The results to be obtained from these different attacks depended in a peculiarly large degree upon the British attack in the centre. It was here that the enemy's defences were most highly organised. If these were broken, the threat directed at his vital systems of lateral communication would of necessity react upon his defence elsewhere.

"On the other hand, the long period of sustained offensive action through which the British armies had already passed had made large demands both upon the troops themselves and upon my available reserves. Throughout our attacks from August 8 onwards, our losses in proportion to the results achieved and the numbers of prisoners taken had been consistently and remarkably small. In the aggregate, however, they were considerable, and in the face of them an attack upon so formidably organised a position as that which now confronted us could not be lightly undertaken. Moreover, the political effects of an unsuccessful attack upon a position so well known as the Hindenburg line would be large, and would go far to revive the declining *moral* not only of the German army but of the German people.

"These different conditions were present to my mind. The probable results of a costly failure, or, indeed, of anything short of a decided success, in any attempt upon the main defences of the Hindenburg line were obvious; but I was convinced that the British attack was the essential part of the general scheme, and that the moment was favourable.

"Accordingly I decided to proceed with the attack, and all preparatory measures, including the preliminary operations already recounted, were carried out as rapidly and as thoroughly as possible."*

In making this decision Haig staked his future; not that such a consideration weighed with him for a moment; but he must have known that failure, with a doubting Government behind him, could have for him but one result. At the time the fact that the War Cabinet sent no congratulations to the army on the victories of Bapaume, of the second battle of the Scarpe, of Epehy, or of Cambrai, victories which gave us nearly 100,000 prisoners, caused much comment. The reason of this neglect was that the War Cabinet to the last doubted of victory and did not wish to appear to exult until all danger of a setback was over. So not until Foch assured Mr. Lloyd George on October 7 that Haig's hammer blows had done their work was any message sent.

Pershing was equally sure that the proved valour, the vigour and enterprise of the American soldier

* Supplement to the *London Gazette*, 7 January, 1919, para. 32, p. 14.

would more than compensate for any lack of experience and training. These were fateful decisions, for if we had not attacked the war could not have been ended before the spring of 1919. The firmness and courage of these two men gave us victory in 1918.

The victory of Bapaume, and the piercing of the Drocourt line in the battle of the Scarpe, had forced the enemy on the front covering Cambrai to take refuge behind the Canal du Nord, but southwest of Cambrai, and west of St. Quentin as far as the Oise, he still held strong advanced positions some three miles in front of the main Hindenburg system.

These positions included the outpost defences of that system and some of the British works which had been prepared to meet the March attack. It was necessary, therefore, before the Hindenburg line could be attacked, to clear the Germans out of these works, and this Haig did between September 12 and 18, while Pershing was busy at St. Mihiel. During this period fifteen divisions of the British Third and Fourth Armies fought the battle of Epehy, and drove twenty German divisions back into the main Hindenburg line, capturing 11,750 prisoners and 100 guns. Simultaneously Debeney's First French Army performed the same function between St. Quentin and La Fère.

While these events were taking place on the Cambrai—St. Quentin front Pershing was quietly transferring troops from the St. Mihiel salient to

Verdun. This movement had begun as soon as it was seen that the American divisions in the front line would succeed in the task of obliterating the salient, and that the reserve divisions would not be needed. It was carried through with the utmost secrecy, the American troops on the new front created by the battle of St. Mihiel doing everything that was possible to produce the impression that the advance would be continued towards Metz and Briey. Between the Meuse and the western edge of the Argonne, which had been inactive for more than a year, French troops continued to hold the trenches while the First American Army assembled behind them, and they were not relieved until the night of September 25-26. There is little doubt that the Germans were surprised when the great battle opened with an American attack between the Meuse and the Argonne, for they had not reinforced their front, which was held by four divisions, who were overwhelmed by the nine American divisions which advanced against them. By the evening of the 27th the Americans had taken the first line defences on the whole front of their attack, and in the centre had pressed forward to a depth of some seven miles, to the southern slopes of Montfaucon. This hill dominates the surrounding country, and for that reason the Crown Prince William had had built for himself on it a palatial dug-out from which he directed the operations in his unsuccessful attempt to capture Verdun.

A gallant attempt to storm the hill and the village on its summit made with the aid of tanks in the evening failed, but both were carried in a second attack the next day. By the evening of September 29 the Americans were in possession of the first and second German systems of defence between the Meuse and the Argonne, and had in places penetrated the third system. Ten thousand prisoners fell to Pershing in this first advance.

Ludendorff now became suddenly aware that he was menaced by a deadly blow at his lateral communications. He could write off St. Mihiel as a regrettable incident; he was, in fact, preparing to come out of the salient when he was attacked. The majority of the troops defending it had been of inferior quality, and the Germans could always throw the blame for their failure upon the Austrians who fought with them. But the capture of Montfaucon was quite a different matter. The Americans were on territory which had not been trodden by Allied troops since the early days of 1914, having broken through defences which had been prepared and held by the Germans since the first days of trench warfare, trenches established on ground as difficult to attack as that on any part of the whole long front. There was no question of yielding voluntarily a foot of that ground, which was especially precious to the Germans as their lines through it ran nearer than elsewhere to the Metz-Maubeuge railway. The American advance, there-

fore, confronted Ludendorff with a crisis which had to be dealt with at any cost.

While the battle had opened thus auspiciously on the Verdun front, Gouraud had attacked simultaneously in Champagne on a front of eighteen miles from the west of the Argonne towards Reims. The Champagne hills had been the scene of Joffre's first efforts to wear down the enemy by the "nibbling" process, and of his attempt to force a way through the trench barrier in one great rush in September, 1915. The left of Gouraud's battle front included part of the ground on which he had defeated the German attack of July 15, when bombardment and counter-bombardment had torn the surface of the heathlands and left an area of desolation and destruction, which, if less deep than that of the Somme battlefields, could only be compared in its intensity with that on the Ypres front.

Forward movement across country so pitted with mine craters and shell holes was very laborious, and the Germans held all the heights commanding the lines of the French advance. Gouraud's progress on the first day was therefore slower than Pershing's, and by the evening of the 27th his infantry had only got forward some three miles. It took him three days of hard fighting to force his way clear of the old battlefields, but by September 30 he had won through, and thenceforward his difficulties diminished just when those of Pershing began

to increase. On October 1 he was on the outskirts of Challerange, some nine miles from his starting point, having captured 13,000 prisoners and more than 300 guns, and having made Ludendorff realise that he constituted a danger not less imminent than that of the American advance. There for the present I must leave the right wing of Foch's battle to turn to the British front.

The British attacks were timed to begin in the early morning of September 27, and on the evening before a great bombardment opened on a thirty-mile front, from a point about two miles north-west of St. Quentin, as far as the Sensée River north-west of Cambrai. Then in the grey light of early dawn the 4th, 6th, 17th and Canadian Corps, thirteen divisions in all, of Byng's Third Army and Horne's First Army advanced on the Cambrai front, stormed the immensely strong Canal du Nord, swept beyond Bourlon Wood and Fontaine-Notre Dame, the extreme limits of our advance in the first battle of Cambrai of November, 1917, and captured Sailly, more than six miles from their starting point, taking over 10,000 prisoners and 200 guns. By this blow Cambrai was threatened from the north, whereas in the previous battle we had attempted to approach the town from the south-east, where the St. Quentin Canal was a formidable obstacle to our troops, and we had in one bound got sufficiently near to the railway lines, which converged on Cambrai and made it one of the most

important junctions in the hands of the Germans, to be able to deny their use to the enemy.

I have already mentioned that Ludendorff had, in his anxiety to protect Cambrai, been withdrawing troops from Flanders. Doubtless he remembered our experiences in the third battle of Ypres, and recalled the fact that the Flanders mud had there done more to check our progress than had the German troops. The season was already far advanced and there had been a good deal of rain. The state of his reserves was such that in order to meet the American advance west of the Meuse, and the British advance on Cambrai, both of them blows aimed at his vitals, he had to take chances somewhere, and he decided to take them on the Flanders front. He left less than five divisions to hold the seventeen miles of front, from near Vormezeele, four and a half miles south of Ypres, to Dixmude, and on September 28 this thin line was attacked and overwhelmed by the Belgian army, supported by some French divisions, and by six divisions of Plumer's Second Army, the whole under the command of King Albert. The success won by the gallant Belgian king, who had seen his army cooped in for four years behind the floods of the Yser, and had only left it at rare intervals, living with his Queen in a little villa within range of the German guns and in a district incessantly attacked by the enemy's bombing aeroplanes, was startlingly complete and exceeded the wildest expectations. The

Flanders ridges, up which we had hewn our way at heavy cost in three and a half months of fighting in the autumn of 1917, were won in less than forty-eight hours. The French and Belgians, following up this success vigorously on the left of the battle, swept forward beyond Passchendaele, and by the evening of October 1 had penetrated almost to the outskirts of Roulers, while Plumer, throwing in three more divisions, drove across the Messines Ridge, cleared the Lys valley from Armentières to Comines, and advanced to within two miles of Menin. Thus Lille, like Cambrai, was menaced from the north.

While King Albert was putting the finishing touches to his victory the crisis of the great battle had been reached and passed. The bombardment which had begun on the evening of September 26 on the front of the British Fourth, Third and First Armies, had been continued on the front of the Fourth Army throughout the 27th and 28th, while the other two armies were fighting their way towards Cambrai. During the final stage of that bombardment nearly 1,000,000 shells, weighing some 25,000 tons, were poured into the German lines. This wholesale expenditure of ammunition took place during about one-tenth of the period of the whole battle, and on considerably less than one-tenth of the fronts attacked.

During the war of 1870-71 the total number of rounds fired by the German artillery in the field

amounted to 360,000, as compared with 4,362,500 tons of shell fired by the British artillery alone on the Western front, and yet, so tremendous had the effect of the German guns appeared to be in those days, that Napoleon III. told his enemies after his surrender at Sedan that he felt himself beaten by their artillery. Science and industry have in less than fifty years developed man's power of destruction to an extent which makes comparison with the past futile.

With this artillery attack we reverted to former methods, and the reason for doing so was, that immediately behind that part of the German front to be attacked by the Fourth Army, ran the St. Quentin Canal, which merges near Cambrai in the navigable Scheldt, is capable of taking the largest barges and is unfordable. With such an obstacle in their path tanks could not be used to prepare the way for the infantry, except against such portions of the German line as lay west of the canal, and against the two stretches where the canal ran under ground, one of about four and a half miles between Bellicourt and Vendhuile, the other of about 1,000 yards long just north of St. Quentin known as the Le Tronquoy Tunnel. Further, there was no longer any question of obtaining surprise, the Germans were well aware that we intended to attack, and therefore one of the great objections to a prolonged bombardment disappeared. So the guns again came into their own. It was long since the Germans had been subjected to

such a dose of shelling, and many of their troops having come from the Eastern front, or being fresh drafts from Germany, had never experienced a really intense and prolonged bombardment. The moral effect of this cannonade was therefore very great. It drove the enemy into his deep dug-outs and tunnels, and prevented his carrying parties from bringing up food and ammunition.

At 5.30 A.M. on September 29 Rawlinson's Fourth Army attacked the heart of the Hindenburg line, on a front of twelve miles, with the 9th British Corps and the 2nd American Corps with the Australian Corps in support behind it. Debeney's First French Army extended the battle front to the south, while two corps of the Third British Army prolonged it to the north as far as the loop in the St. Quentin Canal at Marcoing. This was the decisive day of the great battle and was marked by many glorious feats of arms. The 9th Corps attacked the St. Quentin Canal at and north of Bellenglise, the 46th Division, North Midland Territorials, leading, the men advancing equipped with life-belts, requisitioned from the Channel steamboats, and carrying mats and rafts. Here and there they managed to cross by foot bridges, which the enemy had been unable to destroy, but the majority dropped down the sheer sides of the canal, swam across, clambered out and stormed the German trenches on the top of the eastern bank. Then swinging southward

they surprised the enemy before he had realised the new direction of the attack, and on this one day the division captured over 4,000 prisoners and 70 guns.

The 2nd American Corps attacked the Bellicourt Tunnel front, which the Germans, knowing that it was exposed to tank attack, had fortified with especial care. The 30th American Division stormed through the intricate web of barbed wire and the network of trenches which surrounded Bellicourt, and breaking clean through this section of the main Hindenburg line, carried the village, only to be attacked in the rear by the German machine-gunners who had come out of their subterranean shelters in the tunnel. The Australians coming up in support had to tackle these pests without the aid of artillery or tanks, for both the barrage and the tanks had gone forward with the Americans, but they overcame them, and another breach in the Hindenburg line was effected.

The 27th American Division attacking on the left of the 30th, had an especially difficult task, for the westerly bend in the canal at Vendhuile made it impossible for the British troops farther north to keep pace with the advance of the 27th, and its left flank was exposed to cross fire of artillery and machine-guns from the ridge north-east of Vendhuile on the eastern bank of the canal. Two regiments of the division, the 106th and 107th, had therefore to fight desperately hard to safeguard the left of the division,

while the right and centre pushed on to the village of Bony. Later the British 12th and 18th Divisions forced their way across the canal to the north of the tunnel, and relieved the pressure on the left flank of the 27th American Division which had beaten off repeated and fierce German counter-attacks.

On September 30 and on the following days the yielding enemy was driven back on the whole front of the Fourth, Third and First Armies. On the right of the Fourth Army the 1st British Division had, by the 30th, gained possession of the Le Tronquoy Tunnel, and crossed the canal to the north of St. Quentin, a feat as splendid as that of the 46th Division on the previous day. Its immediate consequence was that the Germans retired from St. Quentin, which fell into the hands of the French on October 1. The Australians, passing through the Americans, sent the right centre of our battle front forward to within touch of the last line of the Hindenburg system which ran through Beaurevoir. The New Zealanders and the 3rd British Divisions crossed the canal to the south of Cambrai, while the Canadians all but encircled the town to the north. By October 3 the Fourth Army had broken through the Beaurevoir line, and by the 5th the whole line of the canal, and the Hindenburg defences along it, were in our hands.

The victory was complete and decisive, and in winning it the three British armies had captured

36,500 prisoners and 380 guns. Thirty British and two American divisions with a British cavalry division had defeated thirty-nine German divisions, holding the strongest defences ever devised by the wit of man. At last after four years of dogged effort the great trench barriers had been pierced, for between the British army and its objective, Maubeuge, there lay but one German line, which the enemy, believing the Hindenburg system to be proof against all assaults, had not troubled to complete. This line lay some fourteen miles back, and its artificial defences consisted of nothing more formidable than a thin fence of barbed wire, with the sites of the trenches to be dug behind it marked out upon the ground. The victors of Cambrai looked out over rolling, wooded, and well-watered country with something of the joy and wonder which filled the soldiers of Zenophon when at the end of their great march they first saw the sea. The leafy trees, the harvested fields, the green meadow lands and the valleys were to an army which had lived and fought for four years surrounded by hideous devastation, with the stink of the blood-soaked, battle-torn ground ever in their nostrils, more convincing evidence of achievement than tens of thousands of prisoners and hundreds of guns.

The effect of the three great blows on the Meuse-Champagne front, on the St. Quentin-Cambrai front, and in Flanders was, as Foch had hoped it would be, to cause the Germans to yield in the intervals between

those attacks. By the end of September the enemy had begun to withdraw between Lens and Armentières before the left of our First Army and our Fifth Army, and there were signs of retirement from the St. Gobain bulge. He was at once pressed by the French and British forces on those fronts, and the battle thereupon enveloped the whole 250 miles from Dixmude to the Meuse. Foch's great conception had been realised; he had delivered his big kick and the whole German front was crumbling under it. For a time, on the British front at least, the German *moral* broke down, prisoners were taken from the German infantry in great numbers and without much resistance, and there were signs of confusion and disorder in the enemy ranks, though the German artillery retained much of its efficiency and the machine-gunners continued to fight with their old devotion and skill.

More important still the resolution of the German High Command was badly shaken. There were no men in Germany to replace the tremendous losses in the field, and many of Ludendorff's divisions were reduced to mere skeletons. He had piled up behind his front, for his great offensive, enormous stocks of shell, and of military stores, and had had neither the time nor the transport to remove them. The Allies had captured thousands of guns. The output of the German munitions factories was quite incapable of making good these losses, and he had ample evidence that the Allied factories had not yet reached the

zenith of their production. In September Haig had more guns, more machine-guns, more ammunition and more aeroplanes than he had ever possessed, while the growth of the American army was daily bringing more and more guns into line.

With dwindling resources, Ludendorff saw himself faced by three great dangers; in the east the Americans, more numerous and efficient than he had believed they could possibly be, were threatening his communications between Metz and Mézières; in the centre the British army had beaten the best of his troops in their strongest defences, and he had no more Hindenburg lines to stay its progress; in Flanders the Belgians, whom he had classed as capable only of defence, had won their way into the open and were fighting with unexpected dash. Lastly, Bulgaria had collapsed, Mackensen was in dire straits and was clamouring for reinforcements to enable him to escape from the Balkans. Under the pressure of these calamities Ludendorff threw up the sponge on the evening of September 28. The next day he and Hindenburg met the Kaiser and the Foreign Secretary, who had come to headquarters, and insisted on an immediate request for an armistice. In the afternoon the Kaiser, without consulting his military advisers and much to Ludendorff's disgust, issued his pronouncement on the introduction of Parliamentary Government and von Hertling ceased to be Chancellor. Ludendorff then sent one of his

staff, Major Freiherr von der Bussche, to Berlin to explain to the Vice-Chancellor von Payer, who was in charge of the Administration while Prince Max of Baden was endeavouring to form a Government, that an immediate offer of peace must be made.* Von Payer pressed for delay, pointing out that there was no Government in power to negotiate, but Hindenburg, who had accompanied the Kaiser to Berlin, immediately replied:

MAIN HEADQUARTERS, OCT. 1, 1918. 1.30 P.M.

To Major Frhr. von der Bussche,
for Vice-Chancellor von Payer.

Provided that a guarantee can be given between 7 and 8 o'clock this evening that Prince Max of Baden is forming the Government, then I agree to postponement until to-morrow morning.

Should there, however, be any doubt about the formation of the Government, then I must insist that the declaration be made known to the foreign Powers to-night.

(Signed) VON HINDENBURG.

Made known to His Excellency von Payer on October 1, 2 P.M. (Signed) FRHR. VON DER BUSSCHE.

This note was naturally assumed in Berlin to be a cry of despair, and when we consider the events which led up to it this seems to be the only possible interpretation. It is now maintained in defence of Hindenburg and Ludendorff that the object of

* Ludendorff's account of these proceedings is contained in pp. 583 *et seq.* of his Reminiscences. He suppresses many of the documents I have quoted.

this startling message, to which Ludendorff makes no reference in his Reminiscences, was to hasten the formation of the new Government, but the formation of a Government could not by any stretch of imagination be supposed to influence the military situation on the front, and there was no reason, if that situation had not been held at German Army Headquarters to be desperate, why Prince Max should not have been given as much time as he needed to form his Administration. Ever since Haig's victory of August 8 Ludendorff had been pressing his Government to open negotiations, because he was then convinced that Germany's military position must go from bad to worse. It seems more than probable that, when the Hindenburg line was broken, he wanted an immediate armistice, because he feared that a general collapse was imminent and that he might, if he could not obtain a cessation of hostilities, be forced before long to accept an unconditional surrender. It is absurd to suppose that he, with his great military experience, could have imagined that the Allied and Associated Powers would agree to any terms of armistice, after they had just won the greatest victory in the whole course of the war, unless those terms made it impossible for Germany to resume the struggle in any form. An offer to conclude peace made immediately after the strongest German defences had been pierced is obviously very different from such an offer put forward when

the Hindenburg line was still intact, and could in the circumstances be nothing less than an open acknowledgment of defeat. It is, therefore, only reasonable to suppose that Hindenburg and Ludendorff believed that their armies had been decisively beaten and that there was no better alternative to such an acknowledgment. The defence that they were influenced by the political rather than by the military situation has been put forward in Germany in support of the fiction that the German army was unbeaten, and that it was the politicians and the German public who lost their heads and surrendered when it was still possible for the German army to wring favourable terms from us.

This defence is shown to be untenable by a statement, made on October 2, on the military situation to the party leaders of the Reichstag by Major Freiherr von der Bussche, who, as Ludendorff admits, had been carefully coached by him and presented his views correctly. The statement ran :

In a few days the situation has fundamentally changed. The collapse of the Bulgarian front has entirely upset our disposition of troops. Our communications with Constantinople were threatened, as well as the shipping route indispensable for the transport of our supplies on the Danube. We were compelled, if we were not to leave the Entente a free hand in the Balkans, to send German and Austro-Hungarian divisions ear-marked for the Western front to those regions, abandoning the Black Sea

and Roumania. We were obliged to make an immediate decision. The entrainment of our troops had already begun. We have every justification for hoping that the situation in the Balkans may be re-established, at all events sufficiently to guard our own interests. Unfortunately, as I shall explain, this cannot be done without great detriment to the situation as a whole. Almost simultaneously with the offensive in Macedonia, violent enemy attacks have been made in the West. They have not found us unprepared. All possible measures have been taken to hold them up. Divisions from the East were on the way to relieve the sorely tried divisions in the West. Unfortunately a portion of these troops had to be diverted to the Balkans. The last men capable of bearing arms had been withdrawn from the East. We calmly awaited the decisive battle. The Entente knew how to conceal from us where the attacks would take place. From the sea to Switzerland preparations for the attack were in progress. The most extensive was against Lorraine and the Sundgau, and we were forced to distribute our reserves and to keep the whole front in a state of readiness for the attack. Considerable forces had to be stationed, especially in Lorraine and in the Sundgau, for the defence of German territory.

After carrying out the necessary movements, we were absolutely convinced that we should emerge victorious from the coming battles, and that we should be able to break the opposition of our enemies by the enormous losses which we anticipated they would suffer. Consequently, by putting in reserves at the right time, we have been able to hold up the enemy at all those places where, by means of tanks, by surprise attacks or superiority in numbers, he has penetrated our lines. The fighting of the last six days may be termed successful for us, in spite of the loss of prisoners and material.

In comparison with our successes in the spring offensive the enemy has made little progress. In the majority of cases his continuous onslaughts have been countered with unusual obstinacy on the part of our troops. According to our own reports the enemy has suffered the heaviest losses.

The majority of our troops have fought splendidly and made superhuman efforts. Their old brave spirit has not died out. The numerical superiority of the enemy has not been able to terrorise our men. Officers and men vie with each other in deeds of valour.

In spite of these facts, the High Command has been compelled to come to the enormously difficult decision that in all human probability there is no longer any prospect of forcing the enemy to sue for peace. Two factors have had a decisive influence on our decision, namely, tanks and our reserves. The enemy has made use of tanks in unexpectedly large numbers. In cases where they have suddenly emerged in huge masses from smoke clouds, our men were completely unnerved. Tanks broke through our foremost lines, making a way for their infantry, reaching our rear, and causing local panics, which entirely upset our battle control. When we were able to locate them our anti-tank guns and our artillery speedily put an end to them. But the mischief had already been done, and solely owing to the success of the tanks we have suffered enormous losses in prisoners, and this has unexpectedly reduced our strength and caused a more speedy wastage of our reserves than we had anticipated. We were not in a position to make use of similar masses of German tanks. Our manufacturers, under the existing pressure, were absolutely unable to supply them in large numbers, without causing other more important things to be neglected. The question of reserves has, however, been

the decisive factor. The army entered the fray with depleted numbers.

In spite of using every possible device, the strength of our battalions sank from about 800 in April, to 540 by the end of September. And these numbers were only secured by the disbanding of 22 infantry divisions (66 infantry regiments). The Bulgarian defeat has eaten up 7 more divisions. There is no prospect whatever of raising the strength. The current reserves, consisting of men who are convalescent, combed out men, etc., will not even cover the losses of a quiet winter campaign. The inclusion of the 1900 class will only increase the strength of the battalions by 100, and that is the last of our reserves. The losses of the battle which is now in progress are, as I have stated, unexpectedly large, especially as regards officers. That is a decisive factor. If the troops are to stem the onslaught or to attack they require more than ever the example of their officers. The latter must, and have, sacrificed themselves unreservedly. The regimental commanders and leaders fought in the front lines together with their men. I will give one example only. In two days of fighting one division lost all its officers, dead or wounded, and three regimental commanders were killed. The small number of reserve officers has sunk to nothing. The same applies to the N.C.O.'s. The enemy, owing to the help he has received from America, is in a position to make good his losses. The American troops, as such, are not of special value, or in any way superior to our men. In those cases in which, owing to numbers alone, they gained an initial success, they were finally held at bay by our troops. They were, however, able to take over large portions of the front, thereby permitting the English and French to liberate some of their experienced divisions and in this way form an almost inexhaustible supply of reserves.

Up till now our reserves have been adequate to fill the gaps and drafts have duly arrived. The hardest attacks were repulsed. The fighting was described to be of unparalleled severity. Then our reserves began to fail. If the enemy continues the attack, the situation may demand a withdrawal from extensive sectors of the front. We can continue this kind of warfare for a measurable space of time, we can cause the enemy heavy losses, devastating the country in our retreat, but we cannot win the war.

This decision and these events caused the idea to ripen in the minds of the Field-Marshal and Ludendorff to propose to the Kaiser the breaking-off of hostilities, so as to spare the German people and their Allies further sacrifice. Just as our great offensive of July 15 was abandoned, when the sacrifice entailed no longer warranted its continuation, so the decision now had to be taken that it was hopeless to proceed with the war. There is still time. The German army is still strong enough to hold the enemy for months, to achieve local successes and to expose the enemy to fresh sacrifices. But every day brings the enemy nearer his goal, and will make him less inclined to conclude a peace with us which will be satisfactory on our side.

Therefore no time must be lost. Every day the situation may become worse, and give the enemy the opportunity of recognising our momentary weakness, which might have the most evil consequences for peace prospects as well as for the military situation. Neither the army nor the Homeland should do anything which would make our weakness apparent; on the other hand, the Army and the Homeland must stand together more closely than before. Simultaneously with the peace offer a united front must be shown at home, so that the enemy recognise our unbending

will to continue the war, if the enemy will not make peace with us, or only a humiliating one. If this should be, then the endurance of the army will depend on a firm attitude at home, and on the power of the Homeland to inspire the Army.

This is a very human statement. It contains the excuses and explanations of men who find themselves beaten and are endeavouring to shuffle out of their responsibility. Much is laid to the account of Bulgaria, who by collapsing unwarrantably has upset the best laid plans of the German Great Headquarters. Ludendorff's advocate says truly that the last man capable of bearing arms had been withdrawn from the East. For some time before the end of September the German divisions on the Russian front had been combed out and the fittest men had been sent westwards to help make good the losses in France. It is obvious that the German battalions in the Western front would not have been permitted to fall almost to half their proper strength, and that twenty-two divisions would not have been disbanded had there been men in the East available for service in the West.

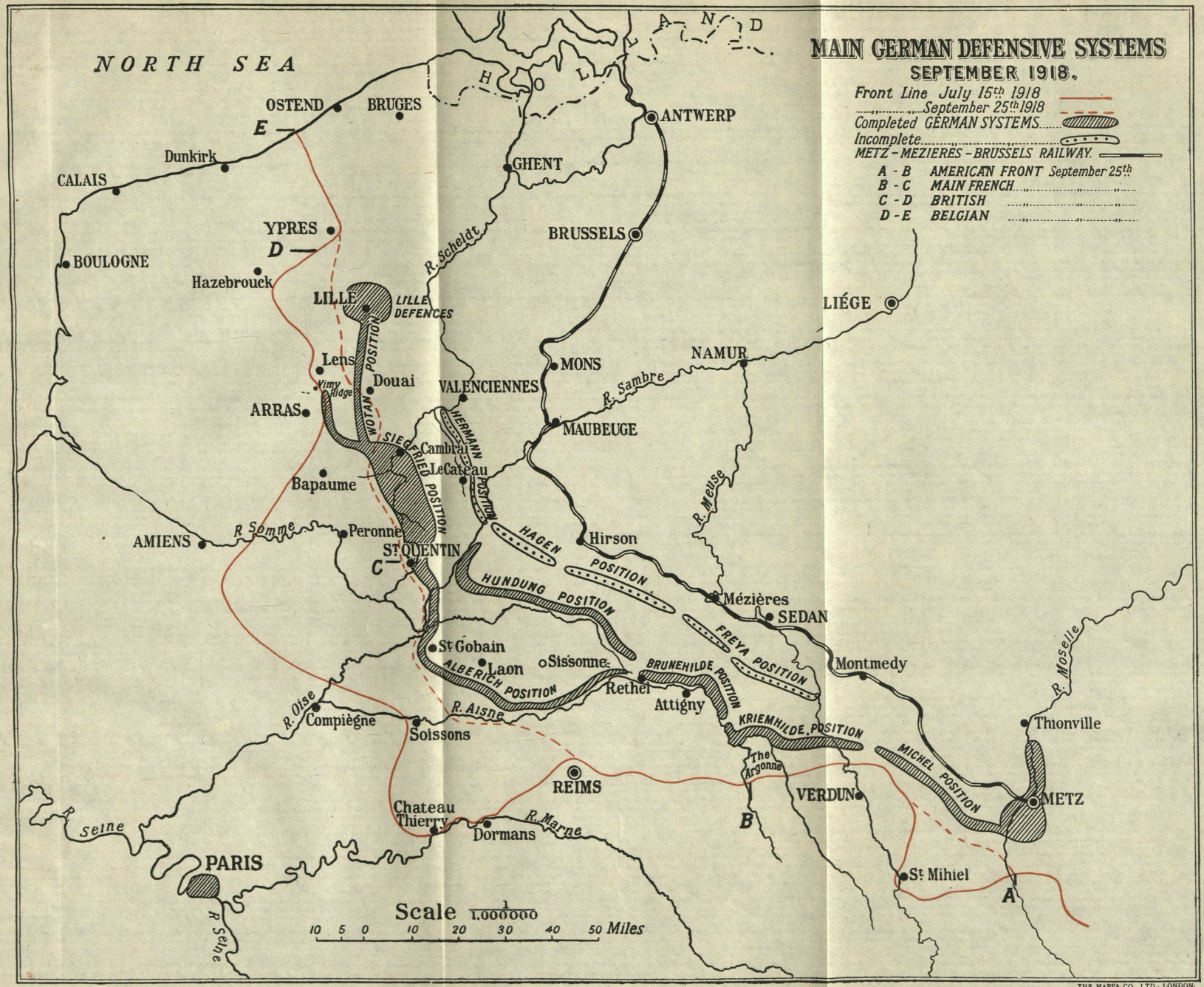
The situation on the Bulgarian front began to be critical on September 19, and by no possibility could troops starting westwards after that date have been in time to save the Hindenburg line. Therefore the statement that "the collapse of the Bulgarian front has entirely upset our disposition of troops" is a gross

exaggeration intended to throw dust in the eyes of the Reichstag leaders and save the face of the General Staff. The defeat of Bulgaria was certain to bring down Austria sooner or later and made the position of Germany hopeless, but the General Staff knew quite well that it would be many months before the Allies would be able to attack the southern frontiers of Germany, and that, vast as was the political effect of these events, they had no immediate influence upon the military situation in France. Bulgaria had asked for an armistice on September 25, for she was very anxious to get it concluded before Mackensen, who was hurrying troops towards Sofia, could intervene. The armistice was signed on September 29, and the fact that Bulgaria had asked for terms and had sent plenipotentiaries to meet Franchet d'Esperey was notified to the world in our Wireless Press Summary of September 28. These facts must therefore have been known to German Great Headquarters on October 2, but not a word is said of them to the Reichstag leaders, who are led to believe that "the situation in the Balkans may be re-established."

After this exordium on Bulgaria's delinquencies comes the true reason for the demand for the immediate opening of peace negotiations. The German armies in the West are in imminent peril, and if hostilities are not stopped promptly they may be unable to escape an overwhelming disaster. That is in plain English what the statement means. The

German troops have been fighting splendidly, and the General Staff had made every possible preparation to meet the expected attack, but our superiority in tanks and the exhaustion of the German reserves have made the position hopeless.

I had written all that I have said in the earlier part of this chapter on the effect of our tanks before this document came into my hands, and it is interesting to see how completely it confirms all the information on this point which we had obtained before the armistice. Not less interesting is the tribute paid to Foch's strategy. Great Headquarters were in fear of attack along the whole front from the sea to Switzerland, and the remarkable statement is made that the most extensive preparations for attack were against Lorraine and the Sundgau, that is the frontier district of Alsace, east of Belfort. This is evidence of the effect of Pershing's victory of St. Mihiel and of the activities of the Second Army in simulating an offensive towards Briey and Metz. It is difficult to make this anxiety square with the disparaging remarks about the American troops, for the German General Staff must have known that the majority of the troops on the Lorraine front were American. This is probably another attempt to save the face of the General Staff, who had declared roundly that the Americans would not be able to train troops to fight in any numbers during 1918. As we know, preparations for an offensive into Lorraine were not completed until


MAIN GERMAN DEFENSIVE SYSTEMS
SEPTEMBER 1918.
Front Line July 15th 1918
September 25th 1918
Completed GERMAN SYSTEMS
Incomplete
METZ – MEZIERES – BRUSSELS RAILWAY.
A - B AMERICAN FRONT September 25th
B - C MAIN FRENCH
C - D BRITISH
D - E BELGIAN
NORTH SEA
HOLLAND
OSTEND
BRUGES
ANTWERP
Dunkirk
CALAIS
GHENT
BRUSSELS
YPRES
BOULOGNE
Hazebrouck
LILLE
LILLE DEFENCES
WOTAN POSITION
R. Scheldt
LIÉGE
NAMUR
Lens
Douai
Vimy Ridge
MONS
VALENCIENNES
R. Sambre
ARRAS
HERMANN POSITION
SIEGFRIED POSITION
Cambrai
MAUBEUGE
Le Cateau
Bapaume
R. Meuse
AMIENS
R. Somme
Peronne
HAGEN POSITION
Hirson
ST QUENTIN
HUNDUNG POSITION
Mézières
SEDAN
FREYA POSITION
St Gobain
Laon
Sissonne
ALBERICH POSITION
BRUNEHILDE POSITION
Montmedy
R. Moselle
Rethel
Attigny
R. Oise
R. Aisne
KRIEMHILDE POSITION
Thionville
Compiègne
Soissons
The Argonne
MICHEL POSITION
REIMS
VERDUN
METZ
Chateau Thierry
R. Marne
Dormans
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PARIS
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some time later, and at this time there were no preparations at all for an invasion of Alsace. Therefore this statement is an admission that Foch had very completely hoodwinked Ludendorff. Most interesting of all is the evidence of the efficacy of Foch's method of exhausting the German reserves before fighting his great battle. The picture drawn of the state of the German army is impressive, and tallies exactly with information received from other sources. Truly the question of reserves was the "decisive factor." The German reserves were exhausted and therefore there was nothing to be done but to make peace as quickly as possible. As the staff officer naïvely remarks, the decision had to be taken that it was hopeless to proceed with the war for the same reasons as led to the abandonment of the great offensive of July 15. The offensive of July 15 was abandoned because the Germans were soundly beaten in the second battle of the Marne. On October 2 the Great Headquarters were compelled to advise that the struggle should be abandoned because the German armies had been beaten.

Hindenburg, on the morning of October 3, confirmed the statement made the previous day by his representative in the following memorandum:

To the Imperial Chancellor. Berlin, Oct. 3.

The High Command insists on the immediate issue of a peace offer to our enemies in accordance with the decision of Monday, September 29, 1918. In consequence of the

collapse of the Macedonian front, and the inevitable resultant weakening of our reserves in the West, and also the impossibility of making good the heavy losses which have occurred during the battles of the last few days, there is no prospect, humanly speaking, of forcing our enemies to sue for peace. The enemy, on the other hand, is continuing to throw fresh reserves into the battle.

The German army still stands firm and is defending itself against all attacks. The situation, however, is growing more critical daily, and may force the High Command to momentous decisions. In these circumstances it is imperative to stop the fighting in order to spare the German people and their allies unnecessary sacrifices. Every day of delay costs thousands of brave soldiers their lives.—(SIGNED) VON HINDENBURG.

The appeal to the Homeland to stand firm, with which the gloomy review of the situation made to the leaders of political parties ends, is curious as coming from men who were pressing with all their energy for an immediate opening of negotiations to men who were anxious to delay so fatal a step until they were better assured that it was unavoidable. Von Payer in particular seems to have taken a much calmer view of the situation than did the soldiers, and before acceding to counsels of despair he wanted to know more. On October 3 he therefore sent Hindenburg the following memorandum:

BERLIN, OCTOBER 3, 1918.

Before coming to any decision as to a peace move, I would request your Excellency to answer the following questions:—

(1) How long can the army hold the enemy the other side of the German frontier ?

(2) Must the Chief Army Command expect a collapse, and if so, when ?

(3) Is the military situation so critical that action should immediately be taken to bring about an armistice ?

(4) In the event of your reply to question 3 being in the affirmative, is the Chief Army Command aware that a peace move, under pressure of the critical military situation, may lead to the loss of German territory, namely, Alsace-Lorraine and the purely Polish districts of the Eastern provinces ?

(5) Does the Chief Army Command agree to the dispatch of the enclosed draft note ?

I should be grateful to your Excellency for an immediate answer.—(SIGNED) PAYER, REPRESENTATIVE IMPERIAL CHANCELLOR.

The draft note referred to is presumably the first request for an armistice sent to President Wilson. Prince Max had arrived in Berlin, and he was no more eager than his Vice-Chancellor to hoist the flag of surrender, but the soldiers were insistent. The same day (October 3) Hindenburg gave the following answer to von Payer's questions :

OCTOBER 3.

(1) The question cannot be answered in exactly the form in which it is put. The holding of the front depends on many factors, amongst others on the resources and ability of the enemy to continue his attacks, and on the duration of our power of resistance.

At present the German army is standing firm. It will withdraw from sectors if forced, clinging toughly to enemy

soil. The duration of such withdrawals cannot be determined beforehand. But it is to be hoped that they may protect German soil until next spring.

(2) Answer to question 1 applies to this question. I do not believe that there will be any general collapse. As long as valuable reserves are at hand the yielding of the front consequent on enemy break-throughs need not have such a result.

(3) This question is answered by my communication of October 3 to the Imperial Chancellor.

(4) Unless things should change, the Chief Army Command will take into consideration the surrender of small French-speaking portions of Alsace-Lorraine. For it there is no question of the cession of German territory in the East.

(5) Draft note was advised, but not enclosed.

These answers and the memorandum to which they refer are very cautious, but leave no room for doubt as to the opinion at Headquarters. The holding of the front is *possible;* the army *may* be able to resist until the spring; the wholesale surrender of Alsace-Lorraine need not be considered *unless things change*, but it is impossible to guarantee any of these things. The situation is highly critical and at any moment it may be necessary to take momentous decisions, that is to say, disaster may overtake the German armies. Therefore it is imperative that negotiations should be opened at once.

On October 4 Prince Max of Baden became Imperial Chancellor, and the next day the first request for an armistice was dispatched to President Wilson. The greatest battle in the world's history had been

fought and won. There was to be bitter fighting before the end came, for Ludendorff made an attempt to rally which met with some measure of success, and the discipline of the German armies, which in the first days of October appeared to be cracking, again for a time asserted its influence. None the less, it was the great battle begun on September 26 which decided the issue of the war. This battle was so vast that no single name has ever been suggested for it.* During its course we British fought the second battle of Cambrai, the battle of St. Quentin, and took a part in the battle of Flanders, the Americans fought the battle of the Meuse-Argonne, the French the battle of Champagne, while the Belgians with French help fought the battle of Flanders. These great struggles, however, made up a whole, conceived and directed by one man. Foch's long-thought-out plans and careful preparations had their reward. He was ably supported by Haig, Pershing, Pétain and King Albert, and each of the Allied armies on the Western front had played its glorious part in Armageddon. Foch had worked patiently and skilfully up to a great climax, and when the climax was reached the whole of the huge machinery under his control had been set in motion and every one of its parts had answered to his controlling hand.

* While this book was in the Press M. Louis Madelin, in the August number of the "Révue de Deux Mondes," has called the great struggle "the battle of France." This name just fails to be apposite, for an important part of the battle was fought in Belgium.

CHAPTER V

LUDENDORFF TRIES TO RALLY

The Delays to the Allied Advance—The Difficulties of the Americans—Ludendorff's Plan of Retreat—How it was Defeated

On none of the three fronts of attack which made up Foch's great battle was it easy to gather the fruits of victory. In Flanders King Albert and Plumer, having crossed the ridges, had behind them ground over which the tide of war had ebbed and flowed for more than four years, and now that it had been finally turned back it had left a morass of stinking mud which had obliterated every road and track. Behind the main British battle lay the deepest zone of devastation on the whole long front. From Vimy Ridge to the eastern outskirts of Amiens, and thence through St. Quentin northwards by Cambrai to Douai, in an area of over one thousand square miles, there was hardly a house to be found intact, no village which had not been gutted; the surface of the ground was torn and blasted by shell fire, the vegetation withered by poison gas, the roads had been destroyed, the railways torn up, and all the bridges over the many rivers and canals blown down. Behind Gouraud in Champagne lay a somewhat narrower but equally

horrible belt of desolation. In rear of the Americans were the battlefields of Verdun.

Therefore, on all the fronts the repair of the communications behind the armies was a stupendous undertaking, which not all the skill and tireless energy of the engineers and working parties could complete quickly. Without food, ammunition and military stores the victorious troops could not get forward, even against a badly shaken enemy, and these could not be brought up to them until the roads and railways had been to some extent restored. So everywhere progress was for a time slow. The Belgians were within two miles of Roulers by October 1, but it was not until October 14 that King Albert, having bridged the muddy gulf behind him, was able to advance and enter the town. Cambrai had been enveloped north and south by British troops on September 30, but the Germans were not completely cleared out of the town until October 9. Debeney, with the First French Army, had entered St. Quentin on October 1, but by the 10th he was only eight miles east of the place. Only on the front between Cambrai and St. Quentin was any rapid progress made. Gouraud had by September 29 advanced about six miles through the German lines, but by October 9 his men were only one and a half miles farther forward.

Neither Gouraud's advance to the west of the forest nor that of the Americans to the east of it had

been sufficiently deep to force the Germans out of the Argonne. Now that forest runs roughly from north-east to south-west along a series of rough ridges which separate the valleys of the upper Aisne and of the Aire. These forest-clad ridges gave the Germans splendid vantage ground from which to harass with artillery and machine-gun fire the Allied troops on either side of the Argonne, and if these troops were to get on there was nothing for it but to clear the forest. By September 28 the American left had penetrated some three miles into the Argonne, but on that date the centre was nearly five miles ahead on the outskirts of Exermont, and was being worried by the German guns firing from the Argonne heights into their flanks and rear. To clear these heights and enable the centre to advance, the American left had to force its way forward through nine miles of the most difficult country on the whole Western front. Under modern shell-fire woods become an almost impenetrable tangle of fallen timber, which affords ideal nests for the enemy's machine-guns. This tangle was made still more difficult by cunningly-placed wire entanglements and stretches of rabbit netting. The forest is cut up by deep ravines with almost precipitous sides, which made it very hard for the infantry to keep touch, while tanks could be of no help to them, and even the most experienced artillery would have been put to it to give them support. It was a question

of hard slogging infantry fighting, and the American infantryman did slog hard, and after eleven days of continuous, grim, dogged effort, by October 10 he had won his way through.

Simultaneously with the advance in the Argonne, which fell to the left of the 1st American Corps, the right of that corps and the 5th and 3rd Corps worked their way forward to the latitude of the northern edge of the forest, while east of the Meuse sufficient progress was made, in conjunction with French troops, to safeguard the flank of the troops west of the river. In all this fighting the casualties of the American First Army were very heavy and the hardships imposed on the troops severe. It is difficult to see how this could have been avoided in the circumstances in which the battle was fought. There was undoubtedly lack of co-operation between the infantry and the artillery and between the aircraft and both. It is equally true that the eagerness of the American infantry to get forward landed them in awkward salients, in which they suffered very severely, and that attempts to rush machine-gun nests by direct attack had to be paid for at a heavy price.

In fact, the experiences of the American army in this their first great continuous offensive battle were in some respects similar to our own experiences in the first battle of the Somme. No one will maintain that the quality of the infantry of the British army, which in the summer of 1918 drove the Germans across the

Somme battlefields into and through the Hindenburg line, can be compared with the quality of the infantry who, two years before, won their way up the Somme heights. Then the pick of the manhood of the British Empire fought and fell, while in 1918 the ranks contained a high proportion of middle-aged men and boys. Yet in 1916 we gained comparatively little at a great price, and in 1918 we won much with far less sacrifice of life. The deterioration in the quality of the German troops in those two years does not wholly account for the change. The essential difference in the two battles is that the first was won by sheer inexperienced valour, the second by valour combined with skill. We have learned in this war that it is possible to train the individual soldier and get him to meet the terrible conditions of the modern battlefield in far less time than had been supposed to be necessary. The clerk from the counting-house, the ploughman from the fields, and the hand from the factory have all shown that with a few months' instruction they can acquit themselves, under conditions such as man has never been called upon before to face, better than the best of the soldiers of old, provided they are sent to take their places in an organisation which has been perfected and of which all the parts are working smoothly together.

Contrary to general expectation, the great war has shown that civilisation and education by develop-

ing intelligence have improved the fighting powers of the race, that the trained will can triumph over the weaknesses of the flesh. But the war has also shown conclusively that the experience of the past still holds good in that the training of the individual is a very small step toward the making of an army. It is even a shorter step to-day than it was in the past, for the organisation of the modern army is infinitely more complex than was that of the armies of old.

In 1918 all the parts of the British army had learned, both by long and bitter experience and as the result of Sir Douglas Haig's careful and systematic teaching, to work together for a common end. Commanders of all grades had learned their jobs, the staffs knew their business, infantry, cavalry, artillery, engineers, trench mortars, machine gunners, tanks and aircraft knew each what the other could do and what the other needed. Sir Douglas Haig had, from the time when he assumed command of our armies in France, established a system of instruction which was continually developed and improved until in 1918 it was the most complete organisation of its kind which has ever assisted an army in the field. Unfortunately, from the middle of 1916—when the first battle of the Somme began—until the German attack in Flanders ended on April 29, 1918, the army had not the opportunity to make full use of the means of

training at its disposal. The first battle of the Somme merged in the battle of the Ancre, which ended in the German retreat to the Hindenburg line. Then came in succession the battle of Arras, the battle of Messines Ridge, and the third battle of Ypres, while the winter of 1917-18 had to be devoted to preparation, with depleted ranks, for the expected German offensive. The respite which the Germans allowed us between the end of April and the beginning of August, 1918, afforded us the longest period of good weather for training and instruction which we had enjoyed since the battle of the Somme, and it proved invaluable. The result of that period of reconstruction, when the full benefits of Haig's instructional arrangements were felt, showed themselves in the battle of Amiens and in the victories which followed it.

Sir Douglas Haig has often been accused of having maintained an extravagant organisation behind his front at the cost of the fighting ranks. He was looking forward confidently to the day when he would get his enemy on the move, and when that day came he was ready. It was the perfection of the organisation of the services behind the British lines, a perfection which was the outcome of long experience, and the scale on which these services were equipped, as much as the increased skill of the fighting ranks, which enabled the British army to fight continuously and victoriously for three months and

keep up that succession of hammer blows to which Foch has paid a generous tribute.

The American army had had little of the war training which had taught the British army its lesson. Many of the divisions which fought in the Meuse-Argonne battle went into action then for the first time. That being so, it was inevitable that there should be defects in co-operation and that a high price should be paid for victory. I have already described the difficulties of the ground over which the American troops fought. The difficulties which confronted the services of supply were not less formidable. On the stretch of eighteen miles between the Meuse and western edge of the Argonne—a front of battle occupied by nine American divisions in the first line, equivalent to eighteen British or French divisions—there were only two main roads running in the direction of the advance, one of them on the extreme right flank, along the valley of the Meuse, exposed to artillery fire from the heights in the hands of the Germans on the east bank of the river, the other on the left flank along the eastern edge of the Argonne, exposed to artillery fire from the forest. There was one more road, which ran through Montfaucon, parallel to the American line of advance, but it was a very poor one, and the bottom soon fell out of it under the combination of wet weather and a never ending stream of traffic. Between these on the front of the main American advance there were

only narrow cross-roads connecting the villages, and these roads had been shelled to pieces. The hilly and wooded nature of the country made the task of constructing new roads, of repairing the existing ones, and of laying railways very laborious, and consequently in the early stages of the battle the transport had to be crowded on to the very few roads which were fit for traffic.

On September 28 the main American advance east of the Argonne had penetrated through the German lines to a depth of seven miles. Eleven days later it was barely two miles farther forward. This slow progress was by no means only due to the necessity of clearing the Argonne, for the centre and right of the First American Army was not troubled by flanking fire from the forest. The difficulties of getting forward food and ammunition and of sending up timely reinforcements and of relieving tired troops caused even more delay. Just as happened in our early battles, so in this, the first great American effort in the war, some divisions had to give ground because they could not be supported in time. The roads behind the army, too few and too poor to take the immense amount of transport which was seeking to find its way forward, became hopelessly congested, and in some cases masses of vehicles were so jammed that they could not be moved either forward or backward for long periods. The consequence of this was that it was not possible to get a regular supply of

food up to the troops in front, and cases occurred in which the men did not receive their usual rations for four days.

There has been a great deal of talk of the breakdown of the American administrative services, and unquestionably things did go wrong; but the critics who lay stress on the defects of organisation which showed themselves are apt to overlook the conditions under which battle was joined. It was a question of attempting to force a decision by a great combined attack on the main German defensive positions at the end of September or of deferring a decisive attack until the following spring. It is probably true that no French or British staff would, after long experience of previous failure, have advised an attack on the Meuse-Argonne front until elaborate improvements and extensions of the roads and railways behind the front of attack had been carried out, and until equally elaborate preparations for prolonging those roads and railways into the territory captured from the Germans had been completed. It is probably equally true that French and British soldiers, after the bitter lessons of the past, would not have attacked with any confidence unless they had ocular evidence that everything had been done beforehand to help them forward. There are times and occasions in war when the valour of ignorance has its advantages. With greater experience the American infantry would have learned to overcome the German

machine-guns with less loss of life, and the services of supply would have worked more smoothly. Had the American army waited to gain that experience, the war would certainly have been prolonged by at least six months, and the cost in life would certainly have been far greater than it was.

Pershing must have taken all these factors into consideration when he threw in his vote for fighting the great battle which began on September 26. He decided that the vigour and valour of his troops would more than counter-balance their lack of battle experience, and he was justified in the result. From September 26 until the Kriemhilde system was finally broken, by making the fullest use of his man power, for 630,000 American troops were engaged in this battle, he continuously menaced the Metz-Mézières railway, and forced Ludendorff to employ more than forty divisions in an ineffectual effort to stem his advance. The American attack, therefore, formed an essential part of Foch's plan, and had it not been successful it is almost certain that the Germans would have been able to withdraw in fairly good order to the Meuse, and that we should not have forced them to sign an armistice on November 11; but before it was successful there were many delays. The first rush forward of September 26 changed to slow progress and a long struggle as much against the difficulties of Nature as against the resistance of the enemy.

Ludendorff Tries to Rally

During the first week in October, then, the Allies were, for the reason which I have explained, delayed on all the main fronts of attack to a greater or less degree. This gave the Germans time to pull themselves together to some extent, and Ludendorff began to see a possibility of re-forming his armies on a new line. There was a good deal of exaggeration at various periods of the war on our side as to the prowess of the Germans as diggers, and they were reported to have defensive lines constructed right back to the Rhine. These existed only in the excited imaginations of those who at one time were disposed to believe that in matters military the Germans were demigods, but it was true that when the Siegfried position was broken through Ludendorff still had defences to which to withdraw. His military policy at this time is indicated in Hindenburg's note of October 3 to the Vice-Chancellor. The army was to fall back as deliberately as possible, when retreat was necessary, to successive positions, and he hoped to be able to keep the Allied armies out of Germany at least until the spring. This programme entailed a slow retirement to the Meuse, and a prolonged stand on that river when it was reached. His left flank, opposite the Americans, was the nearest part of his lines to the Meuse, and his right, in Belgium, farthest from that river. Therefore, the two first steps necessary for a readjustment of his front were to delay the Americans

and to begin withdrawing his right from Flanders. It was equally important that the British advance through Cambrai towards Maubeuge should be checked, for the British were considerably nearer to the Meuse at Namur than were the German troops about Ostend and Roulers. Lastly, it was necessary to withdraw from the bulge in the German line west of Laon, for the position there became daily more precarious once the Siegfried line was broken.

In looking over his map* Ludendorff saw that by beginning to retire at once in Flanders he might hope to establish his troops behind the Ghent Canal and the River Scheldt as far south as Valenciennes. With his northern flank on the Dutch frontier east of Zeebrugge, and a formidable water obstacle in front of his positions to protect them against the dreaded tank, there was a chance of gaining the time necessary to organise an orderly and gradual withdrawal from Belgium, provided Haig and Debeney could be checked sufficiently long between Valenciennes and the Oise. This was the weakest link in his new chain. The beginnings of a defensive position had been prepared connecting the Scheldt south of Valenciennes with the Oise west of Guise. This line, to which the Germans had given the name of the Hermann position, was very far from complete, because it had always been supposed that it

* The positions described in the following pages are shown on Map II.

would take us so long to work our way through the Siegfried system, if we ever seemed likely to penetrate it, that there would be plenty of time to complete the Hermann position. However, the greater part of the Hermann position followed the course of the River Selle, and had great natural strength, which it was hoped would compensate for the lack of artificial protection.

South of the Oise Ludendorff was better prepared to meet and stay the progress of his enemies. East of the St. Gobain massif and of Laon he had the Hundung position, which extended as far south as the Aisne and connected with the Brunhilde position. Both these positions were well fortified, particularly the latter, which stood in the way of Gouraud's advance. The German trenches ran along the north bank of the Aisne, through Rethel, towards the Argonne, and the river lay immediately in front of them, while the north bank here dominates the south bank. It was, therefore, a very formidable obstacle to attack directly, and might be counted upon to delay Gouraud for a considerable time. East of the Argonne as far as the Meuse ran the Kriemhilde position, which had a depth of some two miles, and had not yet been reached by the Americans. East of the Meuse and across the base of the St. Mihiel salient there was the Michel position, which was well entrenched. Behind the Brunhilde and the Kriemhilde positions there were the Hagen and Freya

positions, which, like the Hermann position, had only been sketched out.

On the existence of these various defensive lines, natural or artificial, Ludendorff's plans for rallying his forces and keeping the Allies out of Germany until the spring of 1919 were based. He proposed to carry through an immediate and extensive retreat in Belgium, French Flanders and Artois, to abandon the Belgian coast, Bruges, Courtrai, Lille and Douai, and to establish his front behind the Scheldt through Ghent and Valenciennes. On the front of Haig's main attack he set about retiring to the Hermann position along the Selle, and hoped to compensate for its weakness by massing along it the troops he had economised by shortening his front in the north. He began a withdrawal of his centre from the St. Gobain massif and from Laon into the Hundung line, and prepared for a similar withdrawal in front of Gouraud into the Brunhilde lines. East of the Argonne his programme was to make the most of the natural difficulties of the country to delay the progress of the Americans towards the Kriemhilde position as long as possible.

If the last phases of the war in the West are to be followed, it is important to understand this scheme of Ludendorff's and to appreciate both where and when he meant to stand and fight and where and when he meant to retreat. After the Hindenburg line was broken the front was in a continual state

of flux; news arrived almost daily of fresh progress by the Allied forces, and it was difficult to discriminate between victories won by hard fighting and the consequences of those victories.

There was hard fighting before the enemy was completely smashed, for Ludendorff's plan was attended with a certain measure of success. By October 14, when King Albert was ready to attack again in Flanders, the arrangements for the German retreat were well advanced, and it was on the whole well conducted, though the enemy's rearguards had to struggle to gain time, and in spite of their resistance he had to abandon numbers of guns and great quantities of stores of all kinds. Roulers fell to French troops on the 15th, Thourout was occupied by the Belgians on the 16th, and the next day they entered Ostend. Plumer, meanwhile, had entered Menin and Courtrai and crossed the Lys. On October 18 the Fifth British Army, farther south, had found Lille evacuated by the enemy, and four days later the whole of the Belgian coast was in our hands, and the Germans had reached the line of the Scheldt from Valenciennes to Ghent. There have been many curious examples during the war of the difference between the mentality of the Germans and of other European peoples, but I doubt if there has been anything stranger than their conduct during their retreat through Flanders and Belgium. At the last moment before they retired they brought into

many of the principal towns wagon-loads of the flags of the Allies, which included one peculiarly German invention—a composite banner made up of the colours of their chief enemies, and hawked these round for sale to the inhabitants in order that they might decorate their houses fitly for the welcome to the incoming troops. It is out of the question that this traffic in their shame can have taken place without the assistance of the German authorities, who were not too proud to allow money to be made out of their defeat, but pretended shortly afterwards that they were too proud to acknowledge themselves beaten.

The retreat of the German centre from the St. Gobain massif, Laon, the Chemin des Dames and the neighbourhood of Reims was carried through in fairly good order, though about Reims it was hastened by the transfer to that neighbourhood of the 2nd and 3rd American Divisions in succession. On October 13 the French entered Laon, and two days later found themselves confronted by the enemy in his new positions. Opposite Gouraud the Germans withdrew, when on October 8 the French attacked in force, into their Brunhilde position along the Aisne, from the west of Rethel, through Attigny, to Vouziers, just west of the northern edge of the Argonne.

The German retreat from the main British front between Cambrai and St. Quentin was, however,

not carried through according to Ludendorff's plan. By incessant and skilful work on the part of the engineers, bridges were thrown across the Canal du Nord and the St. Quentin Canal, and the roads were made possible for traffic, while farther back the railways, both narrow and broad gauge, were repaired or relaid, so that as early as October 6, before the German rearguards had been organised, the Fourth and Third Armies were able to begin the second battle of Le Cateau. This battle culminated in a fine attack made on a front of seventeen miles by those armies at dawn on October 8. It was a bold measure to attempt to assemble in darkness, on ground torn up by shell-fire and seamed with trenches and with the wreckage of wire entanglements, such a mass of troops on so wide a front, but the time had come to be bold. The immediate results of this attack were that the 9th Corps, 2nd American Corps and 13th Corps of the Fourth Army, all greatly assisted by tanks, made very important progress in the direction of Le Cateau, while the Third Army was able to complete the encirclement of Cambrai on the south. Debeney, continuing his rôle of extending the battle front of the Fourth Army southwards, simultaneously drove the Germans back east of St. Quentin.

The ultimate results were of much greater importance in their effect upon Ludendorff's plan. The

enemy's intended orderly retreat became a rout, and the roads behind his front converging on the bridges over the River Selle were blocked with troops and transport, so that the time which was to have been employed in the systematic occupation of the Hermann position had to be devoted to restoring order amongst weary and dispirited troops and clearing away such of the impedimenta as could be saved from capture. On October 9 the Canadians entered Cambrai from the north and the 57th Division from the south, and drove the last Germans out of the town, while the Fourth and Third Armies, led by cavalry patrols, took up the pursuit of the enemy retiring towards the Selle, and drove him across the field of the first battle of Le Cateau, where Smith-Dorrien had fought von Kluck during the retreat from Mons. By October 12 the enemy was found to be established in the Hermann position, but his retreat to it had cost him 12,000 prisoners and 250 guns.

On the American front there was no question of a German retreat, and except in the northern part of the Argonne Forest the Americans had to fight hard for every yard of ground they gained. The slow struggle through the southern end of the forest had brought the Americans on October 1 to approximately its centre, and for a week little or no progress was made. Then, fortunately, it became possible to apply the plan, which had been originally attempted

and had failed, of forcing the Germans to evacuate the forest by advancing on both sides of it. On October 6 and 7 troops of the American 28th and 82nd Divisions, after a desperately hard struggle, took the village and château of Chatel and the hills around it which dominate the eastern edge of the Argonne. On October 8—that is, the same day on which the Third and Fourth British Armies made their dawn attack in the second battle of Le Cateau—Gouraud had, it will be remembered, begun his advance to the Aisne, and by the 9th his troops were in position along the greater part of the western edge of the forest. Fearful of being cut off, the Germans thereupon evacuated the Argonne, and on October 10 the 77th American Division was clear of the forest and in touch with the Germans on the outskirts of Grandpré. East of the Argonne there was no such rapid progress, and the Americans fought their way slowly on to the forward positions of the Kriemhilde system, with which they were everywhere in touch by October 14. Five days before this Pershing had handed over command of the First American Army to General Liggett, for the continued arrival of American troops had made it necessary to form a Second American Army of the troops occupying the Wœuvre front, east of the St. Mihiel salient and opposite Metz.

Ludendorff appears to have been fairly well satisfied with the progress of his retreat by October

16. His left and centre were by then back in their new positions, which were strong, and his losses during the retreat, if heavy, had not been overwhelming. His right had not yet completed the retreat from Flanders behind the Scheldt, but he had good reason to believe that it would be able to do so. Accordingly on October 17 he spoke much more boldly to the German cabinet than he had done on October 1. Prince Max of Baden was proposing to pave the way for peace negotiations by offering to abandon unrestricted U-boat warfare and to guarantee that the German troops would not destroy French and Belgian towns during their retreat. The rumblings of revolution were growing louder, and it was vitally necessary to make concessions to the popular party, which had lost all confidence in the Great General Staff, and were becoming more and more determined to enforce peace.

It had become abundantly evident that the German people had only been induced to endure the rigours of the blockade and to hold on by the lavish promises of victory which had been given to them. It was therefore impossible, while the military situation on all fronts was going rapidly from bad to worse and decisions had to be taken quickly, to educate them to an attitude of endurance with the object of minimising the effects of defeat. The pretence that Germany had been fighting a defensive war, which had periodically been put forward by the

Kaiser and his advisers whenever their campaign of conquest was checked, could not deceive anyone, and least of all the German people. The popular sentiment in regard to war was summed up in the phrase, "World power or downfall," the assumption being that there was no doubt as to which of these alternatives would be Germany's fate. With rare skill the German Government and its military advisers had hitherto managed to obliterate the effect of their failure to obtain their chief aims by dazzling victories in secondary theatres of war. They had not succeeded in conquering France in 1914 according to plan, but this had been forgotten in the joy of gazing at the brilliant prospect opened up by the accession of Bulgaria, the overrunning of Serbia, and the opening of the road to the East. The conquest of Roumania had obliterated the memories of Verdun; the collapse of Russia and the victory of Caporetto had been ample compensation for the long, costly and unfruitful struggle on the Western front during 1917. Now, however, there was no carrot to dangle in front of the donkey's nose. Even in an autocratic country it is not possible to deceive all the people all the time, and the German people knew in October, 1918, that the victory which had been promised to them could never be obtained.

The revulsion of feeling and the collapse of confidence were such that no enthusiasm could be

aroused for a war of endurance in defence of the Fatherland. Yet this was what Ludendorff proposed. He wished the negotiations to be continued with President Wilson, but refused to agree to the acceptance of any terms which would make Germany militarily defenceless. He protested energetically against the renunciation of the U-boat campaign, and claimed that the German army should be allowed to take any and every measure which would delay the enemies' advance. But while he was actually pressing his views upon the German cabinet another blow had fallen upon him, and his new front had been broken.

The enemy's position along the River Selle, which was the connecting link between the Scheldt and his lines south of the Oise, was, as I have said, naturally formidable. His left flank opposite Debeney's army rested on a series of very defensible wooded heights which divided the valleys of the Selle and the Oise. On the front of the Fourth British Army the Germans held the eastern bank of the Selle, and had occupied the line of the railway which connects Le Cateau and Solesmes. This railway line runs through a series of embankments and cuttings, which provided the German infantry with excellent cover and their machine gunners with positions from which they could sweep the valley, while the rolling heights behind gave their artillery splendid opportunities for dominating the approaches to the river. In front of

the railway line a single, and as compared with the entanglements of the Hindenburg line not very formidable, belt of barbed wire had been erected, but the Selle, ordinarily an insignificant stream, had been dammed by the enemy and was in flood, and in itself constituted a serious obstacle to infantry, which would have to force its way across in face of machine-gun fire. The sites for a strong trench system had been marked out by digging down to a depth of about one foot, but the German infantry and engineers, weary and dispirited by their defeats, had not the energy to complete these trenches in the time at their disposal. None the less, the attack on such a position was a serious undertaking, particularly as the enemy, knowing that it covered the direct road to Maubeuge, had occupied it in great strength and had numerous machine-guns and a powerful artillery.

The battle of the Selle began in the early hours of October 17 with an attack by Debeney's First French Army and the 9th, 2nd American and 13th Corps of the Fourth British Army against the German left, from Le Cateau southwards. The enemy fought well, the 27th and 30th American Divisions having a particularly hard task in their attack upon the railway line south of Le Cateau, where it ran along a commanding hill. It was only after two days of strenuous effort that the Germans south of Le Cateau were forced back behind the Sambre and

Oise Canal. It was quite evident from this fighting that the enemy was making a desperate effort to hold up our advance. Appeals were issued to the German troops to remember the devastation, which they had seen in Belgium and northern France, and to save their country from a like fate. But, though they fought valiantly, they had lost confidence both in themselves and in their leaders, and they had none of the grit and staying power which distinguished the British soldier when he was in like straits. However, it still remained to tackle the German main position along the Selle west of Le Cateau, and this was done in a night attack by seven divisions of the Third Army and one of the First Army. A mist in the valley increased the cover afforded by night, and enabled the infantry and engineers to lay foot bridges across the Selle under the very noses of the enemy's machine gunners, and tanks to be brought down unseen into the valley. At 2 A.M. on October 20 the British infantry advanced to the assault, and helped by the ubiquitous tanks, which succeeded somehow in getting across the river, they stormed the heights on the east bank after fierce fighting, for the Germans again fought hard.

The weather had broken, the ground was saturated, there was little shelter for the troops, the roads churned up by shell-fire and by the stream of traffic became rivers of mud, and both roads and railways

were constantly being cut by mines, which the enemy had buried beneath them and fitted with delay action fuses, so that they would explode at irregular intervals after our troops had passed beyond, but the enthusiasm of the British troops was not to be denied. On October 23 the Fourth, Third and First Armies made a general advance on a front of fifteen miles between the Sambre and Oise Canal and the Scheldt. On the right the Germans were driven back into the Mormal Forest, in the centre our troops got within a mile of Le Quesnoy, and on the left approached Valenciennes. Thus, in the battle of the Selle, British, French and American troops had made a breach, about thirty-five miles wide and nearly six miles deep, in Ludendorff's rallying line. The twenty-four British and two American divisions engaged had defeated thirty-one German divisions and had captured 20,000 prisoners and 475 guns.

I have mentioned that on October 14 the Americans were in touch with the forward positions of the Kriemhilde system. On that day there began an eight-day battle on the front from the Meuse to Grandpré, in which by incessant hard fighting the Americans broke into the formidable German defences at a number of points. On October 16 Grandpré was taken, while Gouraud on the American left stormed the heights about Vouziers and crossed the Aisne. On the 16th, 17th and 18th a succession of fierce attacks, in which four divisions took part,

enabled the Americans to pierce the Kriemhilde line near its centre. The Germans fought desperately to hold the line and employed some of their best troops, including the 3rd Guard Division, the infantry of which was almost annihilated. The most important result of this battle was to exhaust the German defensive power on the Meuse front just as Haig's attacks had exhausted it on the Cambrai-St. Quentin front, a secondary result being to straighten out the American line, so that by the end of the month it was well placed for another general forward movement.

I have already explained that Ludendorff's plan of deliberate withdrawal to the Meuse depended on holding off the British on the Selle and the Americans on the Kriemhilde line. He was endeavouring to assure his Government that there was no cause for despair when the news of the Selle battle and of the American attacks on the Kriemhilde line reached them. It convinced them that there was no line upon which the German army could be relied upon to stand, and it shattered what little faith they had left in their military adviser. On October 26 Ludendorff tendered his resignation, which was accepted, and the next day he left Great Headquarters. The capitulation of Turkey, following upon that of Bulgaria, and the decisive defeat of the Austrians on the Piave coupled with the never-ending tale of disaster on the Western front, and

the growing unrest in Germany left no glimmer of hope in the minds of the Kaiser and his ministers. While they were preparing to send in plenipotentiaries to Foch, he, in order to make assurance doubly sure, was setting the stage for the final advance.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAST PUSH

The American Advance to Sedan — Gouraud Reaches Mézières—The British enter Maubeuge and Mons—The Condition of the German Army — Was the Armistice Premature?

At the end of October Germany's armies on the Western front had suffered a series of crushing defeats, her navy was seething with mutiny, her working class population were on the verge of starvation, the German people were at last aware of the extent to which they had been deceived by their rulers, and all of her allies had collapsed. The military power of the United States was but half developed, the output of the Allied munition factories had not reached its zenith. After a long and bitter struggle we had won a definite superiority in the air, we had aeroplanes ready of a type capable of bombing every town in Germany, and the U-boat menace had been scotched, if not definitely mastered. There could be only one end to the war; the question was when that end would come.

The situation of France in 1870 after the battle of Sedan had been, except as regards food stocks and the determination of the people to resist, more hopeless

than was that of Germany on October 30, 1918. Almost the entire French army as it had existed at the outbreak of the war had disappeared, and France, too, had realised that she had been deceived by those she had placed in authority over her. She overthrew the Government; under the inspiration of Gambetta's leadership she created new armies and went on fighting for six months, during which she caused her apparently irresistible foe many moments of anxiety. Germany had no need to create new armies. Those she had in the field were still capable of prolonged resistance provided they were inspired with patriotic devotion, and determined not to yield until the last extremity. Her enemies were still far from her frontiers, there were many strong natural barriers between the Allied armies and the interior of Germany, and the German armies, if permitted to fall back to these, would obtain a shorter and stronger battle front on which they might hold out throughout the winter. There was no precedent for a great and powerful nation, which was fighting for its existence, surrendering while it still had the means to resist. Therefore, it was necessary to continue to press the enemy until his means of resistance were destroyed or until his will to fight was finally broken. Foch therefore planned another great combined drive against him.

When Germany in 1914 first invaded Belgium and France by far the greater number of the German

troops deployed on the Western front had crossed the line extending from the Dutch frontier north of Liége to Metz, a distance of 115 miles. As the war went on and Germany developed her man power, her forces on the Western front had been strengthened, and in the early months of 1918 they received a very great reinforcement consequent on the collapse of Russia. In August, 1914, some fifty-four German infantry divisions had passed between the Dutch frontier and Metz, and by the middle of 1918 the front of deployment of 115 miles had developed into a battle front extending from the North Sea near Nieuport to Pont-à-Mousson on the Moselle south of Metz, a great arc with a circumference of about 350 miles. The maximum strength of the German armies on and behind the circumference of this arc amounted in May, 1918, to about 190 divisions. These divisions were smaller than those of August, 1914, but their appurtenances, guns, mortars, machine-guns, aeroplanes and war material of all kinds had in the four years multiplied exceedingly. Even when Ludendorff had completed his retreat after the great battle of September 26—October 3, his front from the Dutch frontier to the neighbourhood of Metz was not less than 250 miles in length, and the number of divisions which he had on that front and in reserve was not fewer than 160.

Therefore, in order to make good their retreat the Germans had to get back across the 115 miles

about three times as many men and many times as much material as Moltke had sent westwards across that line in August, 1914. In fact, they had to get their armies through the neck of a bottle. It was like trying to force an oak plant, which has grown in four years from an acorn in a bottle of water, back into the bottle without destroying the plant; a difficult problem if the neck of the bottle were clear, but it was not. Behind the German centre lay the forests and mountains of the Belgian and Luxembourg Ardennes, a region traversed by few roads and fewer railways, and washed by the Meuse, which had a limited number of bridges. The main exits lay north and south of the Ardennes, in the north from Liége to Namur, in the south from Mézières to Longuyon.

The course of the Meuse from Mézières to Namur runs generally northwards, but at Namur, where the Sambre joins it, it makes a sharp bend eastwards. The consequence of this was that the German troops on the Scheldt on either side of Ghent would, when in their retreat they reached the longitude of Namur, still have fifty miles to march to the river, and would only find east of Namur four points of passage. If the British succeeded in crossing the Meuse between Namur and Dinant before the German forces in Belgium had got over the river, there was a probability that they would be driven against the Dutch frontier and forced to surrender; if the

German centre had not made good its retreat before Gouraud and the Americans captured Mézières and Sedan it was in danger of being cut off. There was, therefore, no longer any question of the leisurely retreat to the Meuse which Ludendorff had planned. It was essential to withdraw to the river as quickly as possible, but to do this without incurring irremediable disaster it was still as necessary as it had been since the end of September to delay to the utmost the British advance on Namur and the American progress towards Sedan.

This was the position of which Foch proposed to take advantage by continuing the general plan of his great battle. Gouraud and the Americans were to strike for Mézières and Sedan and block the southern exits, while the British armies made for Maubeuge and Mons and threatened Namur before the Germans in western Belgium could get away. The advance on Namur would force the Germans to come out of the greater part of Belgium in a hurry or be cut off, and would save that sorely tried land from the destruction which was inevitable if it became the scene of pitched battles, while the advance on Mézières and Sedan would have the same effect on the German centre. The French armies in the centre were, therefore, to continue their rôle of harassing and delaying the German retreat, and the Belgian armies were to keep the Germans busy on the Scheldt. The French troops on King Albert's right, however, with the help of two

American divisions sent up to reinforce them, were to assist the British advance by forcing the line of the Scheldt about Audenarde.

On November 1 the last drive began, as had Armageddon, with a Franco-American attack, and again there lay in front of the American left a stretch of mountain forest, the Forest of Bourgogne, a northern extension of the Argonne. Again the intention was to force the Germans out of the forest by a combined advance of the Americans to the east of it, and of Gouraud's army to the west. This time the plan was completely successful. On the right of the American battle front the 3rd American Corps attacked in the Meuse valley, while the 5th American Corps broke clean through such parts of the Kriemhilde line as it had not previously captured, and made an advance of about five miles in the one day. Simultaneously Gouraud extended his hold on the heights on the eastern bank of the Aisne opposite Vouziers. The Germans were in no mind for a repetition of the Argonne struggle. Before the battle started their *moral* had begun to give way under the steady pressure of the American advance, and now it gave way altogether, while the American divisions which had done most of the hard fighting in October had either been rested and their ranks refilled, or had been relieved by fresh divisions, with the result that the First American Army was as full of vigour and energy as it had been on September 26,

despite the continuously wet and cold weather on the bleak hills of the Meuse.

On November 2 the 1st American Corps on the left of the First Army drove forward six miles, captured Buzancy, and lined the eastern edge of the Bourgogne Forest, Gouraud at the same time reaching its western edge throughout its length. The Germans immediately evacuated the forest and began a general retreat before the First American Army and Gouraud's right. During the night of November 3 the infantry of the 2nd American Division, giving the weary Germans no time to reorganise a defence, made a remarkable pursuit and advanced in the darkness straight through the German lines for a distance of five miles. This great progress enabled the Americans to bring forward long-range guns and to shell the railway stations of Longuyon and Montmédy, through which the Crown Prince was trying to get away as much as possible of his war material.

The clearing of the Bourgogne Forest had enabled Gouraud to join hands with the Americans on November 3 to the north of the forest, and he thus obtained a straight front of some nine miles beyond the Aisne east of Attigny. He was now able to threaten the retreat of the German troops holding the formidable Brunhilde line farther west between Attigny and Rethel, by pushing forward his right wing in conjuction with the American advance. On

November 4 he drove the enemy back from the southern portion of the canal which connects the Aisne near Attigny with the Meuse near Sedan. This manœuvre compelled the Germans to fall back from the Brunhilde line in order to avoid being cut off from Mézières, and the French entered Rethel on November 6.

Meanwhile, by November 5 the American front had sprung forward another six miles, and on the evening of the 6th, despite the endeavours of the German machine-gunners to delay the pursuit, a division of the 1st American Corps reached the Meuse opposite the southern outskirts of Sedan, twenty-one miles from its starting point of November 1. Gouraud, with a longer distance to go and with the resistance of the German troops, who had fallen back from the Brunhilde line, to overcome, did not reach his objective, Mézières, until the evening of the 10th. While the 1st and 5th American Corps were advancing northwards towards Sedan the right of the 3rd Corps began to strike out eastwards, and it crossed the Meuse and occupied Dun on November 4. Thence on the following days, the 3rd, 2nd Colonial and 17th French Corps on the right of the First American Army gradually wore down the resistance of the Germans in the wooded Meuse hills, and on the morning of November 11, when the Armistice came into effect, the Franco-American front was within six miles of Montmédy, where the German Crown Prince had

lived during the battle of Verdun, when he was not in his dug-out on the Montfaucon Hill. Though Montmédy was not entered by the Allies until the Germans had withdrawn in accordance with the Armistice terms, they found on arrival that defeat had not changed the German nature, for the little town was pillaged by the enemy's troops before they left. These operations on the east bank of the Meuse towards Montmédy were extended southwards by the Second American Army, which began the long threatened movement toward the Briey iron fields. The reasons for this development I must leave for the present to follow events farther north.

While the French and Americans on the southern battle front were completing the task set them by Foch, the British armies were again in motion. The Germans at the end of October, after their defeat on the Selle, occupied the line of the Scheldt from Ghent to a point about two miles south of Valenciennes, whence their front ran southwards to the River Sambre, which it reached a little above Landrecies. The distance between the Scheldt and the Sambre on this line was not more than eighteen miles, and the southern five of these eighteen miles were taken up by the Mormal Forest. Sir Douglas Haig's first care was, therefore, to get more room for his advance between the Sambre and the Scheldt, and particularly to force the enemy to fall back from the tangle of reclaimed land, cut up by innumerable

dykes, which stretches north of Valenciennes as far as the Condé Canal. Accordingly, on November 1, while the Americans and French were attacking on the Meuse-Argonne front, the 17th Corps of the Third British Army, and 22nd and Canadian Corps of the First Army, attacked south of Valenciennes, and after two days' heavy fighting had by the evening of November 2 turned the line of the Scheldt from the south, and the Canadian corps had entered Valenciennes. This at once gave Haig the elbow room he required, and as there was no time to spare, if the enemy was to be prevented from making good his retreat to the Meuse, the Fourth, Third and First Armies attacked on November 4 on a thirty-mile front, from the Sambre Canal eight miles south of the Mormal Forest to the north of Valenciennes. The British right had the difficult tasks of crossing the Sambre Canal, which is as wide as the Scheldt Canal stormed on September 29, and contains more water, and of forcing a way through the Mormal Forest. This forest was not so serious an obstacle as it had been in August, 1914, when after the battle of Mons it caused the separation of the British army into two parts, one retreating on each side of it, for the Germans had obtained a great quantity of timber from it for their trenches, huts and dug-outs, and they had also improved the roads through it. Nevertheless, it afforded a resolute enemy splendid opportunities for defence, and both

it and the canal prevented the Fourth Army from making free use of its tanks.

The British army was now fighting on the very ground on which it had first assembled in France, before it advanced to Mons, and was about to take complete revenge for its early misfortunes. A dense artillery barrage rolled forward, and behind it, with the help of tanks wherever they could be used, the infantry on the whole thirty miles broke into the German positions. On the right the 1st and 32nd Divisions of the 9th Corps fought their way across the canal near Catillon, and by nightfall were more than three miles to the east of it. Farther north the Germans were driven far back into the Mormal Forest, and troops of the 25th Division of the 13th Corps, crossing the Sambre on rafts, captured Landrecies at the south-east corner of the forest. Landrecies was defended by a battalion of the German 1st Guard Reserve Division; it was in Landrecies that British Guards first met the Germans, when, on August 25, 1914, they repulsed a night attack in the streets of the town. North of the Mormal Forest the 37th Division and the New Zealanders, after repulsing a heavy German counter-attack, drove the enemy back beyond the Valenciennes—Avesnes railway, which runs through the centre of the forest from west to east, and the New Zealanders, surrounding the old fortified town of Le Quesnoy, compelled its garrison to surrender. By

the evening the left of the Third Army, and the right of the First Army, were on a front five miles beyond Valenciennes. On the British right Debeney's First French Army had also forced a crossing over the Sambre Canal to the north of Guise and kept pace with the advance of our Fourth Army. In this battle the resistance of the enemy was definitely broken and he never rallied again. The three British armies captured 19,000 prisoners and 450 guns, and Debeney gathered in 5,000 more prisoners. South of Ghent the two French corps on King Albert's right, which each now had an American division with them, drove back the Germans along the Scheldt, and the 91st American Division captured Audenarde.

From this time until the end the pursuit was delayed mainly by the very complete destruction of the roads and railways by the Germans as they fell back, and by the consequent difficulty of getting up supplies to the troops. The enemy's difficulties in retreat were, however, much greater. Far into Belgium the roads were blocked with masses of transport and the railways with thousands of trucks, for the removal of which the Germans had not sufficient engines. Our aeroplanes swooping down from the sky attacked the German convoys and railway lines with machine-gun fire and with bombs, causing great destruction and frequent panics. A single battalion of the 25th Division on November 5 took possession of thirty guns, which the German artillerymen had

abandoned when attacked from the air. By November 5 our troops were well beyond the Mormal Forest. On the 7th the Guards entered Bavai, on the 8th the Fourth Army occupied Avesnes. On the 9th the Guards and 62nd Division occupied the fortress of Maubeuge, the French taking Hirson on the same day. On the 8th the Germans began to fly from the Scheldt, and the British Fifth and Second Armies, with the French and Americans on their left, who had been preparing to deliver a great attack on the river line on November 11, finding that the enemy were slipping away, followed hard after him and made rapid progress. Peruwelz, Tournai and Renaix were occupied in succession, while by a last dramatic stroke of fortune the 3rd Canadian Division entered Mons a few hours before the Armistice was signed. There were many curious coincidences between our first and last contact with the Germans in arms. Officers of our cavalry who had fought at Mons in August, 1914, found themselves on November 11, 1918, on the scene of their original encounter with the German troopers; while most curious of all the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment, which had fought in the 3rd Division in the loop of the canal north-east of Mons on August 23, 1914, was with the 63rd Division entering that loop when hostilities ceased.

The opinion is widely held that the Armistice of November 11 was premature. It is argued that we

had the German armies at our mercy, and that the foundations of peace would have been more sure if we had ended the war by forcing the surrender in the field of a great part of those armies, or, failing that, had driven our beaten enemy back across the Rhine and followed him into the heart of Germany. The reception of the German troops by the German people, their march into the German towns through triumphal arches and beflagged streets with their helmets crowned with laurels, and the insistent statements in Germany that the German armies had not been defeated, that the Armistice had been accepted to save bloodshed, and to put an end to the sufferings of the women and children aroused amazement and disgust in the victors. There was very real anxiety lest after all we had failed to convince Germany that war did not pay; it was felt that we ought to have brought the realisation of what war means home to the German people in their own country, and that, had we done so, the long-drawn-out negotiations in Paris would have been concluded more speedily and more satisfactorily. It is worth while, therefore, examining the situation as it was at the time of the Armistice, and considering the case as it presented itself to the men who had to decide whether hostilities should cease or not.

There is no question but that the German armies were completely and decisively beaten in the field. The German plenipotentiaries admitted it when they

met Marshal Foch, and von Brockdorff-Rantzau admitted it at Versailles, when he said after the Allied peace terms had been presented to him: "We are under no illusions as to the extent of our defeat and the degree of our want of power. . . . We know that the power of the German Army is broken."

Even if these admissions had not been made, the condition of the German lines of retreat to the Rhine is conclusive evidence of the condition of their armies. Every road was littered with broken-down motor trucks, guns, machine-guns and trench mortars. Great stacks of supplies and of military stores of all kinds were abandoned. Every railway line was blocked with loaded trucks which the Germans had been unable to remove. The sixty miles of railway in the valley of the Meuse between Dinant and Mézières was filled from end to end with a continuous line of German freight trains carrying guns, ammunition, engineering equipment, and other paraphernalia. On the Belgian canals alone over eight hundred fully charged military barges were found. It is beyond dispute that on November 11 the lines of communication immediately behind the German armies had been thrown into complete disorder by the streams of traffic which were converging on the Meuse bridges, disorder greatly intensified by the attacks of the Allied airmen. The German armies, unable to resist on the fighting front, could no longer retreat in good order, partly because of

the congestion on the roads and railways behind them, which not only hampered the movements of the troops, but prevented the systematic supply to them of food and ammunition, partly owing to the fact that there were not horses left to draw the transport of the fighting troops. The following description of the condition of the German Army at the time when it began its march back to the Rhine in accordance with the terms of the Armistice has been recently published in Berlin.

Many of the units of the army were unable to move for lack of transport horses. Even those which were able to march had but little of their former mobility because the loss of horses had been so great. The majority of the troops were unaccustomed to long marches, the horses were in very poor condition, and the daily losses even during the retreat to the Antwerp-Meuse position had been very great. There was a deficiency of boots, winter clothing, hoof-pads, and frost nails, and winter weather might set in at any time. Almost all the casualty clearing stations, the ambulances and the hospitals were overcrowded owing to the continuous stream of wounded and sick, which poured in in consequence of the fighting which continued right up to the Armistice.*

Not less remarkable is a report from the headquarters of one of the divisions of the 17th German Army of the Crown Prince Rupprecht's group. The number of the division is obliterated on the report, which is dated November 8, 1918, and was found in

* *Die Rüchfuhrung des Westheeres*, Berlin, 1919.

a Belgian farmhouse. I have therefore been unable to identify the division, but it appears to have been one of those which was opposed to our First Army. The report runs: "The division can only be considered as unfit for battle. Owing to the extremely heavy casualties, to sickness and to numerous desertions, the average strength of regiments* is under 600. Still more important as regards efficiency in battle is the shortage of officers, of which no regiment of the division has more than twelve, and one regiment has only nine. Almost all the machine-guns in the division have been lost or are out of repair, and half the guns of the artillery are deficient. Owing to lack of horses, less than half the transport of the division can be moved, and if the retreat continues many guns and vehicles will have to be abandoned. Owing to lack of petrol, much of the motor transport of the division cannot be moved. The division has not received rations for two days, and the condition of the horses which remain is becoming very bad, because owing to constant movement there is no time to collect supplies from the country, and forage for them is not arriving."

If ever armies were in a state of hopeless rout, the German armies were in the second week of November, 1918. The *moral* of the troops was gone, the organisation of the services on which they

* A German regiment consisted of three battalions, and its full strength was about 3,000 men and 64 officers.

depended for their needs had collapsed. This being so, why did we allow the German armies to escape from a hopeless position? Why did we not at once follow up the military advantage which we had gained at such cost?

In order to get an answer to these questions I visited the fronts of the Allied armies shortly after the conclusion of the Armistice. I there found, after travelling down the line from north to south, that amongst the fighting troops of the Belgian, British, French and American armies the opinion was unanimous that they had got the Germans on the run and could have kept them on the run indefinitely, or until they laid down their arms. On the American front in particular, where there were large numbers of troops ready and eager to go forward who had not yet taken part in a great battle, there was a very strong feeling that they had been robbed of the fruits of victory. When, however, I inquired the opinion of those behind the fighting fronts who were responsible for feeding the troops and keeping them supplied with all that was necessary to enable them to march forward, I heard a different story. Everywhere I was told that the Allied armies, which were on or were marching towards the Meuse, had on November 11 reached, or very nearly reached, the farthest limit at which for the time being they could be kept regularly supplied. The reasons for this were twofold. In the first place the Allied lines of communi-

cation grew steadily longer as the Germans were driven back, and even before our victorious advance began the state of the railways and the amount of rolling stock in France had caused anxiety. For four and a half years the railway systems of north-eastern France had been strained to the limit of their capacity, and the effects of that strain were beginning to be serious in 1918. Both we and the Americans had made great efforts to improve and extend the railway systems in our respective zones. During 1918 the British military railway administration in France built or reconstructed 2,340 miles of broad gauge and 1,348 miles of narrow gauge railways, while to supplement the French rolling stock we sent to France 1,200 locomotives and 52,600 cars. The shipment across the Channel of such cumbrous and heavy objects as locomotives and trucks was a slow and difficult business, and the needs of the armies were always growing faster than were the resources of the railways. During the last four months of the war the weekly average load carried by the British military railways in France amounted to over half a million tons.

If these were our difficulties, those of the American army were greater, owing to the rapid growth of the army during the latter half of the year 1918, the shortage of shipping capable of crossing the Atlantic, and the necessity of giving first place to the transportation of troops and of war

material. Up to the end the railways under American control in France suffered from a deficiency in rolling stock, and had great difficulty in meeting the demands of the large forces engaged in the Meuse-Argonne battle at the end of an ever-lengthening line of communications. The French armies, which in the middle of September had been extended along the outside of the great bow made by the German lines between St. Quentin and Verdun, had the longest distances to advance in following up the German retreat, and before the advance began the French Government had cut down the railway transportation in the interior of the country to the bare minimum necessary for the preservation of the industrial and social life of France, and even then was unable to meet the full demands of the French armies and to supplement the railway material which Great Britain and America had been able to produce. The Belgian armies had hardly any resources of their own and no means whatever of developing their means of transportation. The result of all this was that the mere lengthening of the Allied lines of communications by the German retreat, apart altogether from any other action by the enemy, threw a very great strain upon the Allied railway administrations.

The Germans were, however, very active and skilful in damaging the roads and railways before they retreated, and this damage was extended by

the destructive power of the artillery of both sides. Every railway bridge, large or small, was blown up, the railway embankments were cut, long stretches of track were destroyed, the stations were burned down, and the telegraph lines were almost obliterated and the instruments removed. The Germans had left behind them mines buried under the railway lines, and these exploded often after the first damage had been repaired and the trains were running, with the result that there was constant interruption to the traffic. One of our Army Commanders told me that, owing to the constant explosion of mines behind his front, during the last stages of the advance of his army his railhead was retreating faster than his troops were advancing. The consequence of this was that on November 11, despite the most strenuous and devoted work by all concerned in the repair and working of the railways, the farthest points at which supplies could be delivered by rail were from thirty-five to fifty miles in a direct line behind the front, and often double this distance by road. This gap had to be bridged by the motor transport, which, of course, had to use the roads. But the destruction of the roads by the Germans was as thorough as their destruction of the railways. Not only were the bridges destroyed, but mines were sprung at every cross-road. I remember counting eleven mine craters on three miles of the main road between Le Quesnoy and Mons. This damage could only be very roughly

repaired, while the wet weather and the heavy traffic of the German retreat and of our advance increased the work of destruction. The heavy motor lorries, loaded with supplies and ammunition, had to plough their way slowly through these broken roads from the railheads to the troops, and return to the railheads to fill up. At the time of the Armistice the motor lorries were working in double and treble shifts, and the strain upon them caused by the bad roads and the incessant work was such that in the Fourth Army on November 11 more than half of the lorries at the service of the army had broken down. The troops were receiving no more than bare necessities, and at one time had with them nothing more than the day's food carried by the men.

The advance of the British army towards Germany did not begin until November 17, six days after all fighting had ceased, and actually only sixteen of the fifty-nine British infantry divisions in France and Belgium at the time of the Armistice—that is, less than one-third of our whole army—moved forward. Though there was no interference by the enemy, and the advance was made by slow stages, it proved impossible to keep even this comparatively small part of our army supplied with their full rations, and at the beginning of December it was necessary to call a halt because the supply trains were running more than forty-eight hours behind scheduled time. A very similar story could be told of the

situation on the Belgian, French, and American fronts.

Nor was the feeding of the fighting troops by any means the only problem of supply which the Allied armies had to solve. The Germans in their retreat had left behind them in the liberated provinces of France and Belgium a large civilian population on the verge of starvation. In the French provinces on the British front alone there were nearly 800,000 persons to be fed, and during a period of six weeks, until the French Government could undertake the distribution of supplies, we distributed more than 5,000,000 rations amongst the civilian population, a task which threw an immense additional burden upon the transportation services. The French armies on their own front had very much larger numbers to deal with, and, as it taxed all their resources to repair the main roads and railways so that the troops on the front might be fed, many French villages and small towns off the main lines of communication remained isolated for long periods, and were only kept from starvation by having food brought to them by aeroplanes. Added to all this, the Germans as they retreated released large numbers of prisoners of war without making any provision for their feeding. The people of Belgium of their necessities made great sacrifices in order to do what was possible for these unfortunate men, whose sufferings were often intense, but their means were not equal to their

generosity, and yet another burden was added to the work of supply.

This being the situation on the front at the time when the Armistice was signed and during the days which followed its signature, it is obvious that a great and rapid advance to and across the Meuse by the Belgian, British, French and American armies, such as might have brought about the complete destruction of the German armies and ended the war with a colossal Sedan, was out of the question. It is true that on November 11 two British cavalry divisions had passed through the front and were ready to pursue the enemy. Sir Douglas Haig has expressed the opinion that this cavalry would have been able to turn the retreat of the Germans on the British front into a complete rout, but it is very improbable that any action by such a comparatively small force of mounted troops would have been able to affect seriously the situation on the whole long front, and their influence, though it would certainly have been considerable, must necessarily have been local. The plain fact is that on, or very soon after, November 11 it would, had hostilities been continued, have been necessary to call a halt of the Allied armies between the Dutch frontier and the Meuse until the roads and railways behind them had been repaired and the services of supply were again able to work normally. That is to say, it would have been necessary to give the enemy a breathing space, which would have

allowed him to restore some sort of order in his ranks and make good his retreat to the Meuse, where he would have been able to establish himself on a very much shorter front and in very strong positions. This would have entailed fighting at least one more great battle and have cost us very many lives.

There was, however, a part of the front on which the Allied armies had made little progress and behind which their communications were in good order; that was the front between the Meuse, north-east of Verdun, and the Swiss frontier. As I have explained, Pershing's victory of the St. Mihiel salient had given Foch an opportunity for invading Lorraine, and the French Marshal had all his plans ready for the extension of his long line of battle by an advance into Lorraine when hostilities ceased. In fact, the manœuvres preliminary to this advance had begun on November 7, when the three French corps immediately east of the Meuse attacked in the direction of Montmédy, a movement followed by the advance of the second American Army through the Wœuvre, as the country east of the St. Mihiel salient is called, towards the famous ironfields of Briey. The left of the Second American Army had driven the Germans back some three miles in the Wœuvre by the morning of November 11. The general plan for this new attack was that the left of the Second American Army should be protected by the advance of the right of the First American Army and of the three

French corps on Longwy—the French fort on the Luxembourg frontier, about fifteen miles north of Briey, which had been captured in 1914 by the German Crown Prince in the first invasion of France—the Second American Army was to attack towards and across the Briey ironfields, which lie north of Metz, while another Franco-American attack was to be made east of the Moselle and to the south of Metz. These two attacks, which were to have been in full swing by November 14, were intended to isolate the great German fortress. Now there is very little doubt but that this battle on the Lorraine front would have ended in another great Allied victory, for the Germans would have been greatly outnumbered and their troops on this part of the line were not of the best quality; but it is equally certain that it would have exposed a great part of Lorraine to the ravages of war, and very probably also to the same widespread destruction which the Germans had carried out during their retreat farther north.

The general situation at the time of the Armistice, then, was that the Allied armies between the Dutch frontier and the Meuse were for the time being incapable of carrying on a sustained advance, though two British cavalry divisions were ready to begin a local pursuit on a portion of the British front. The Germans in front of them had been utterly defeated and were almost helpless, but we were not, and could not for some little time, be in a position to complete

their destruction as a military force. It was, therefore, reasonably certain that if the Armistice had been refused the Allied armies would have had to fight hard and would have suffered serious losses, while there was the risk of exposing the greater part of Belgium, including the cities of Brussels and Antwerp, and the great Charleroi industrial district —which were still in the hands of the Germans—to destruction. Everything was ready for another battle on the Lorraine front, but this, too, would certainly have cost us many lives and have caused much damage to valuable property, which is to-day intact and in the hands of the French. The problem which the Allied and Associated Governments and generals had to decide was whether they would continue to fight on these terms or would impose such conditions of armistice upon the enemy as would render him militarily impotent. They decided on the latter course, and I think there are very few who would have taken upon themselves the responsibility of deciding otherwise.

The criticism of the decision to stop fighting on November 11 has been due to the feeling that the German people do not recognise that their armies were beaten in the field, and the fear that this state of mind may sooner or later cause them to fight again. My own conviction is that the reception of the German troops in Germany and the statements made in the German press and by the German

people that the Armistice was not the consequence of defeat were not unnatural, and can be explained. In November, 1918, the German people could only get news of what was happening on the front through the newspapers, and the newspapers got their information through the military Press Bureau. The officials of that bureau, either because they were so inured to lying that they could not tell the truth, or in the hope of staving off revolution by continuing to deceive the people, announced, from the first days when things began to go wrong for them right up to the end, that the German armies were fighting splendidly, that the front was everywhere intact, and that the troops were falling back, slowly and steadily, according to plan to better and stronger positions. No inkling was given of the true state of affairs on the front, and the German people ascribed the surrender either to the revolution, if they were not in favour of it, or more generally to the desire of the new Government to get the blockade raised as quickly as possible. When the German troops came back to their homes and began to talk, the truth gradually became known, and the German people were able to see for themselves the state of the army which had once been their god. I do not think that there is to-day any intelligent German who does not know that the German armies were utterly beaten, though there may be many who would not admit as much to a foreigner.

It has begun to dawn upon most Germans that it is more disgraceful to admit that they accepted defeat, ignominiously surrendered their navy, gave up the greater part of their artillery and aeroplanes, handed over large quantities of rolling stock and military stores, and permitted the armies of their enemies to occupy the Rhine unopposed, that they did all this when they still had the power to fight on, than to acknowledge that their armies were defeated in the field. I do not believe that we shall in the future hear much more of the unbeaten German armies, except perhaps from a few extremists like Bernhardi, nor do I believe that if we had not stopped fighting on November 11 it would have been possible to make Germany any less capable of resistance than she is to-day.

I set out in this book to describe the general course of the last great campaign on the Western front. I am not, therefore, concerned with the story of the downfall of Bulgaria, Austria and Turkey, except in so far as these have contributed to the defeat of our chief enemy. The trials of the spring of 1918 had taught us that common sense which is the essence of strategy; we had learned that the Western front was for us the vital front, and we had concentrated there every man who could be spared from other theatres of war; but Sir Charles Monro's expansion of the Indian army had enabled us to replace the British troops withdrawn from Palestine

with Indian troops who could not be employed in France. Thus Allenby was still powerful, while any weakening of the British and French forces in Macedonia had been compensated by the addition of a Jugo-Slav division to the Serbian army and the growth of the Greek forces. The Germans had withdrawn all their troops in Italy to France, so that the Italians were not only able to dispense with part of the assistance which we and the French had given them after Caporetto, but were able to send a contingent to France, and even so were superior to the Austrian armies on their front. Therefore, common sense indicated that as soon as Foch's policy of exhausting the German reserves in the West had taken effect, and Germany was no longer in a position to help her friends, every possible effort should be made on every front. By that time it had become clear that the direct road to Germany was the shortest road, that the barrier in the West was penetrable, and therefore, while the attack upon our enemies upon all fronts became general, there was no doubt as to where the main attack was to be made or any attempt to seek the defeat of Germany by taking the way round. Had there been no good reason to expect that the Allied armies in France would be able to pierce the Hindenburg line, then, when the arrival of American troops had placed the safety of the Western front beyond question, it might have been right to seek victory by the way

round. Fortunately, this was not necessary, for it would have greatly prolonged the war.

So it happened that, while Foch was completing his preparations for Armageddon, Franchet d'Esperey was driving back the Bulgars, Allenby was overwhelming the Turks, and about a month later, on October 24, the Italians began the third battle of the Piave. By the time that Austria collapsed Ludendorff's attempt to rally had been defeated, and the fate of the German armies in the West was sealed. The Italian victory, therefore, came too late to affect the main issue, nor did Allenby's campaign, though of vital importance in its influence on the future of the East, hasten by an hour the defeat of Germany. The defeat of Bulgaria, on the other hand, did, as I have shown from the statements made by Hindenburg and his advisers at the time, unquestionably weigh with the political and military leaders of Germany and helped to convince them of the hopelessness of their position.

The controversy between the advocates of an Eastern and of a Western policy, which so long agitated us, is a symptom of defective organisation. Conflict between the political demands for dispersal of force and the military demands for concentration are nothing new in war. It has always been a very difficult problem to adjust them, and in the case of a scattered Empire such as ours the problem is peculiarly complex. War, as the Germans were

never tired of telling us, is an act of policy, and it is the business of the statesman to define policy in war as in peace. The soldier is as much his servant as the civilian administrator in Whitehall. It is the statesman's duty to determine the objects of the war, to say what interests are vital to the security of the nation and what may be neglected with impunity, to increase our power by bringing in allies to our side, and to diminish that of the enemy by detaching from him potential or actual adherents to his cause. War, however, is not an abstract problem. It is a struggle against an opponent whose intentions and resources can only be surmised from incomplete evidence. Miscalculations and mistakes entail loss of life and, maybe, disaster. Therefore, before the statesman decides on his policy it must be translated for him by experts into a definite plan which shows him what his policy entails in men and in time, and gives him the best possible estimate of how the enemy will endeavour to counter the plan. It is very easy to take a map and place one million men in the Balkans, or a quarter of a million in the Galiipoli Peninsula, and picture the results of their action when they have arrived. It is quite another matter to calculate accurately how long it will take to get the men to those places, to estimate what will be needed to maintain them when they are there, and to forecast what the enemy may do while they are moving to their positions.

Mr. Lloyd George's proposal, made early in 1915, to transfer the British army to the Balkans would have been admirable had it been practicable. He maintained, with good reason, that such a manœuvre would assure the safety of Serbia, bring in Italy, Greece, Bulgaria and Roumania on our side, enable us to complete the encirclement of the Central Powers, cut them off from Turkey and the East, would open up communication with Russia, and allow us to attack Austria in overwhelming force. It opened up a dazzling prospect when compared with Kitchener's prophecy of a war lasting three years and with the slow and costly process of wearing down the Germans in the West. The fallacy in the plan was that we had not the military power ready to provide for security in the West and in the East while it was in preparation. It would have taken us many months to move an army to the Balkans and to equip it. While it was on the move it would have been incapable of action, and in the interval both the Western front and Egypt would have been exposed to attack. Even if Germany was unable to get the Turks to organise an effective attack upon Egypt and did not again mass troops against France, there was no guarantee that she would not anticipate us in the Balkans, as from her central position she might readily do, and with the help of Austria, Bulgaria and Turkey destroy our expedition while it was concentrating. The translation of Mr. Lloyd

George's plan into practical proposals involved a careful survey of ways and means and elaborate calculation of time and space. These were the business of the soldier. But we had made the grave mistake of taking too narrow a view of our commitments when we first entered into the war. No one save Kitchener, who was only brought into the War Office after war had been declared, had foreseen that we would be engaged in a world war and a long war, and it took even Kitchener time to grasp that our part in such a war could only be directed from a great general headquarters in London. We allowed the General Staff at the War Office to be broken up, and it was long before it was built up again. The result of this was that the Government was deprived of expert assistance at the time when it was most needed, and individual Ministers devoted their energies, abilities and influence to advocating particular plans of campaign which appealed to them, in place of supporting one carefully thought out and agreed policy.

The Dardanelles Commission has made public the melancholy story of the inception of that enterprise. As a plan of campaign it promised, if successful, results as brilliant as Mr. Lloyd George's Balkan enterprise, while it had the advantage over its rival that it enabled us to make use of our sea power for offence and that it did provide from the outset a definite measure of protection

for Egypt, for it was clear that the Turks would not venture to attack the Suez Canal while Constantinople was menaced. The plan was faulty because Mr. Churchill had formed an exaggerated estimate of the power of naval guns against land defences, because the machinery for getting the expert naval opinion before the Government on this question was defective, and because we were drawn into a military enterprise for which we had not the means ready, when it was found that the Navy had been given an impossible task. Owing to this same absence of organised expert advice, the Mesopotamian expedition was allowed to drift gradually into commitments which were beyond its powers. So our energies were exhausted in controversies which need not have arisen if the rôles and responsibilities of the statesman, the soldier and the sailor had been clearly defined, and if the Government had been equipped with the means of surveying the whole ground from the outset, and of learning what various alternative policies entailed in men, guns, ships, material and time. In our special circumstances "side-shows" were inevitable. We had to protect India, and keep the Suez Canal open; we could not allow the Germans a free hand in Africa to organise native forces at their leisure. We could not therefore concentrate all our forces in the Western theatre and leave the outlying parts of the Empire to look after themselves. The fact was, however, that so large a part of our total power was

required in order to make the Western front safe that we were never able, until our enemies were on the verge of exhaustion, to conduct offensive campaigns elsewhere to a decisive issue. Because that truth was not realised in time, we frittered away our resources and prolonged the war. In the end circumstances compelled us to renounce our strategical heresies, and victory followed.

Not only was the defeat of the German armies due to Foch's campaign in the West, but that campaign made victory possible in all theatres of war by discouraging Germany's allies, who, like the German people, had been kept in the war by promises of victory, and by depriving them of her aid at the moment when they were most in need of it. The sudden change of the tide of fortune from the ebb to the full flood of victory, the vast extent of the operations, and the swift succession of blows struck made this campaign a stupendous climax to a stupendous war. In 118 days the great German army which set out confidently to capture Paris on July 15, 1918, had been utterly and completely broken. It had been driven back to the French frontier, and made incapable of further resistance. During the period of rather less than four months which had elapsed since the beginning of the second battle of the Marne the British army had captured 188,700 prisoners and 2,840 guns; the French army, 139,000 prisoners and 1,880 guns; the American

army, 44,000 prisoners and 1,421 guns; the Belgian army, 14,500 prisoners and 474 guns—a total of 385,500 prisoners and 6,615 guns. Many thousands of machine-guns and trench mortars and thousands of tons of war material of all kinds must be added to this tale of booty, while the enemy's losses in killed and wounded are estimated to have amounted to 1,500,000.

This wonderful result, which even as late as the end of September no one would have ventured to foretell, was due to many causes, of which, in the military sphere, three are predominant: the genius of Foch, the unexpectedly rapid development of America's fighting power, and the marvellous recovery of the British army from its reverses of the spring. To Foch's genius I have already paid my tribute. In his "Principles of War," which embodies his teaching at the French War College before the war, he says: "Great results in war are due to the commander. History is therefore right in making generals responsible for victories, in which case they are glorified, and for defeats, in which case they are disgraced. Without a commander no battle, no victory is possible. . . . The will to conquer, such is victory's first condition, and therefore every soldier's first duty, but it also amounts to a supreme resolve, which the commander must, if need be, impart to the soldier's soul." Foch's will to conquer wavered neither in the dark days of 1914 nor through-

out the long period of trench warfare, when many in high places were talking of a deadlock and planning for a patched-up peace, nor in those still more critical days of March, 1918, when he was first called to the helm to steer the ship from the rocks, and the storm of the German offensive was at its height, nor when the Germans surprised him in May and a second time menaced the capital of France. But the stoutest will in the world can at best refuse to admit defeat; it cannot compel victory unless it is accompanied by knowledge and skill. Foch had the knowledge and skill which come of long study and careful thought, and these he added to his iron will. Great results in war are due to the commander, and, therefore, our first tribute must be paid to Marshal Foch.

Even Foch could not have foreseen how nobly his will to conquer and his genius in planning would be supported. Early in April there had been one American division fit to take its place in the line; by November 11 twenty-four American divisions had fought in battle and had won, and there were many more ready to fight. I doubt if, even after the second battle of the Marne, there was a single Allied general who believed that it would be possible for a great American army to force its way triumphantly through the German lines. Many of the American divisions who fought in those last battles which brought us victory went into action with little or no experience of trenches, and with none at all of the hell on earth

which constitutes a modern battle. The multiplicity of weapons and the complications of tactics which four years of war had produced, and the fact that an entirely new element had entered into war with the development of aircraft, all made the effective handling of troops in battle a far more difficult problem than it had ever been. Neither the American generals nor the American staffs had had experience in fitting together the numerous parts of the military machine or in handling large bodies of troops. For all these reasons a great attack by American troops against intact German defences on the most difficult part of the front was a bold experiment. It was one thing to obliterate the St. Mihiel salient in thirty hours, to stop the German rush at the Marne, or even to drive the Germans from the Marne to the Vesle in co-operation with Allied troops. It was quite another matter to fight continuously on a front of some twenty miles for close on fifty days, through line after line of German trenches, in a battle which entailed the employment of nearly three-quarters of a million American troops. It was done because America placed the pick of her splendid manhood in the field, and that manhood went ahead at the job in front of it without counting the cost. By doing its job it gave us victory in 1918.

Of the achievements of the British army in this last campaign, under its great leader whose calm

judgment, coolness in adversity, unselfish patience, when unsupported at home, and bold decisions, when the time came to be bold, were vital factors in our triumph, a Briton can hardly write temperately. The "Old Contemptibles" of 1914 have become almost heroes of legend, and their wonderful recovery from the retreat from Mons, their advance to the Marne and the Aisne are rightly reckoned as amongst the proudest records of the British army. I took part in the retreat from Mons and in the subsequent advance of our little army, and I saw both what our army had to endure in the spring of 1918 and what it accomplished in the last months of the war, and I am convinced that the achievement of the National Army of Great Britain transcends even that of her old Regular Army. That National Army for six weeks, from March 21 until the end of April, withstood the full brunt of the greatest military effort of which Germany was capable. It was driven back at one point to a depth of forty miles, it lost 70,000 prisoners and 1,000 guns and suffered 300,000 casualties; 55 of its divisions were attacked by 102 German divisions, and still presented to the enemy a front he could not break. Then, starting on August 8, it fought uninterruptedly and victoriously for three months, driving the enemy back 120 miles, taking more than twice as many prisoners and more than three times as many guns as it had lost, and completely routing the German armies by which it was

opposed. This is a record with which any army coming fresh into the field might be content. That it was accomplished after four and a half years of bitter struggle is an achievement to which no words can do justice.

The soldiers of France were not less splendid. They had to endure first while Great Britain was making of herself a great military power, and then, when Great Britain's efforts were insufficient to turn the balance, while America was placing her armies in the field. The Germans had again and again boasted that France was bled white, that she was weary of the war and would not fight. From 1916 onwards the next winter was to see the collapse of France. From every trial, with her country ravaged, and many of her richest provinces in the hands of the most brutal tyrant of whom history tells, she rose again to a new effort, until at last she drove her oppressor back to her frontiers and her poilus marched triumphantly through Alsace-Lorraine to the Rhine.

The soldiers of little Belgium, who for more than four years had protected the last little strip of their country west of the Yser after the German tide of invasion had been stemmed on that river, had, under the leadership of King Albert, whose spirit was as indomitable as that of Foch, issued from behind their water-lines, had fought with a fire and dash wholly wonderful in an army which had long been condemned to inaction and had none of the means of

replenishing its ranks at the disposal of the other Allies, and had conquered. It is idle to argue as to who won the war. Germany could not have been beaten in the field, as she was beaten, without the intimate co-operation of all the Allied armies on the Western front directed by a great leader, nor without the co-ordination for a common purpose of all the resources of the Allies, naval, military, industrial and economic. If victory is to be attributed to any one cause, then that cause is not to be found in the wisdom of any one statesman, the valour of any one army, the prowess of any one navy, or in the skill of any one general. Our triumph was due to the justice of our cause and to the faith to which, even in the darkest days, the free peoples of the world held firmly —the faith that right is might.

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THE WESTERN FRONT

Front Line March 20th 1918
" " July 15th
" " September 25th
" " October 30th
" " November 11th

NOTE: The front between La Fère & Quéant was practically identical on March 20th & Sep 25 the front between Reims & Verdun was the same on July 15 & September 25th

Direction of AMERICAN Attack 1.
" " GOURAUD'S " 2.
" " BRITISH " 3.
" " KING ALBERT " 4.
Railways shown thus

NORTH SEA
HOLLAND
BELGIUM
GERMANY
LUXEMBURG
LORRAINE
The Ardennes
The Argonne
Champagne
Mormal Forest
Bourlon Wood
Bourgogne Forest
Chemin des Dames

DOVER
CALAIS
Boulogne
St Omer
Hazebrouck
Montreuil
St Pol
Doullens
Amiens
Albert
Miraumont
Courcelette
Pozières
Martinpuch
Thiepval
Bapaume
Beauvais
Compiègne
PARIS
Dunkerque
Nieuport
Ostend
Zeebrugge
BRUGES
Dixmude
Thourout
Roulers
Langemarck
Passchendaele
Poperinghe
Ypres
Zillebeke
Menin
Locre
Kemmel
Comines
Messines
Bailleul
TOURCOING
ROUBAIX
LILLE
Armentières
Merville
Neuve Chapelle
Bethune
la Bassée
Lens
Drocourt
Vimy Ridge
Arras
Croisilles
Monchy
Sailly
Queant
Bullecourt
Peronne
Roye
Nesle
Montdidier
Lassigny
Albert
Courcelette
Thiepval
Martinpuch
Pozières
Bellicourt
Bellenglise
Le Tronquoy
St Quentin
Ribemont
Guise
Villers Brettoneux
Chaulnes
Amiens
Albert
Ancre
Somme
Oise
Aisne
Marne
Scarpe
Selle
Sambre
Meuse
Escaut
Lys
Canal du Nord
Canal de la Sensée
Meuse-Aisne Canal
Ourcq
Vesle
Suippe
Aisne
Soissons
Buzancy
Villers-Cotterets
Oulchy-Breny
Fère en Tardenois
Château Thierry
Dormans
Epernay
Chalons-sur-Marne
REIMS
Rethel
Attigny
Vouziers
Challerange
Souain
Sissonne
Laon
St Gobain
LaFère
Chauny
Noyon
Ham
Roye
Nesle
Montdidier
Lassigny
Beauvais
Compiègne
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Fère en Tardenois
Château Thierry
Dormans
Epernay
Chalons-sur-Marne
PARIS
Zeebrugge
Ostend
Nieuport
Dunkerque
CALAIS
Dixmude
Thourout
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Selzaete
GHENT
ANTWERP
R. SCHELDT
Roulers
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Passchendaele
Courtrai
Poperinghe
Ypres
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la Bassée
Lens
Drocourt
Douai
Scarpe
Vimy Ridge
Arras
Monchy
Croisilles
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Queant
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Epernay
Chalons-sur-Marne
PARIS
Beauvais
Compiègne
Audenarde
Renaix
Tournai
Orchies
Peruwelz
Condé
Valenciennes
Denain
Maubeuge
Bavay
le Quesnoy
Solesmes
Cambrai
Caudry
Marcoing
le Cateau
Gauzeaucourt
Epehy
Beaurevoir
Vendhuile
Landrecies
Avesnes
Hirson
Liart
Mezières
Sedan
Chimay
Couzoire
Mons
Ath
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Louvain
Charleroi
Namur
Huy
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Givet
Dinant
Malmedy
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Longuyon
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Etain
Verdun
Fresnes
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St Mihiel
Pont-à-Mousson
NANCY
Toul
Luneville
Bar le Duc
Buzancy
Dun
Grand-pre
Exermont
Chatel
Montfaucon
Ville-sur-Tourbe
St Menehould
Vouziers
Challerange
Souain
Rethel
Attigny
Sissonne
Laon
St Gobain
LaFère
Chauny
Noyon
Ham
Roye
Nesle
Montdidier
Lassigny
Beauvais
Compiègne
Soissons
Villers-Cotterets
Oulchy-Breny
Fère en Tardenois
Château Thierry
Dormans
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Chalons-sur-Marne
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Meuse-Aisne Canal
Aisne
Vesle
Ourcq
Marne
Somme
Oise
Ancre
Escaut
Lys
Canal du Nord
Canal de la Sensée
Scarpe
Selle
Sambre
Meuse
Suippe
Aisne
Bourlon Wood
Mormal Forest
Bourgogne Forest
Chemin des Dames
Champagne
The Ardennes
The Argonne
JULY 15
AUGUST 8
AUGUST 21
AUGUST 30
SEPTEMBER 12
SEPTEMBER 25
OCTOBER 30
NOVEMBER 11
MARCH 20

Scales
0 5 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 MILES
0 5 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 110 120 KILOMETRES

THE MAPPA COMPY LIMITED

BIBLIOTEKA
ASG
NAUKOWA
14360