



Gen. John J. Pershing.  
From painting by Joseph Cummings Chase in Paris, 1918.

## My Experiences in the World War By General John J. Pershing

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W. N. U.  
Service

### Petaín "Most Agreeable."

A visit to French general headquarters at Compiègne was made, primarily to meet General Petaín and the officers of his staff. Petaín is above medium height and weight. He wore a full mustache, slightly gray, and was then about sixty. He has a kindly expression and is most agreeable, but not especially talkative.

His keen sense of humor became apparent from the jokes he told at the expense of some of his staff. Our conversation after luncheon was almost entirely on military affairs, including America's probable part in the war, which, as matters stood, gave little promise of becoming effective until the following spring.

My impression of Petaín was favorable and it remained unchanged throughout the war. Our friendship, which I highly treasure, had its beginning at this meeting.

At the luncheon there were several general officers, among whom was Maj. Gen. Franchet d'Espèrey, then in command of a group of armies under Petaín. He was considered one of the ablest and most aggressive officers in the French army and was very popular with his men.

As we wished to get a glimpse of the actual front he took us by motor as near as possible without drawing the fire of the enemy's artillery, although at that time there was little activity on that part of the front. The point of observation that we reached was opposite St. Quentin, which was then within the enemy's lines, and which was later near the center of the great German drive of 1918 against the British.

On the return trip the chauffeur, after being cautioned several times, continued to drive at a somewhat dangerous speed, which so exasperated the general that he finally threatened the chauffeur with violence, whereupon the speed was greatly reduced.

### CHAPTER VI

As soon as the formalities incident to our arrival in Paris were over—and I made them brief as possible—we got down to work, as it was urgent that we should begin at once to lay the foundation for the development and employment of the American army.

To expedite handling the many questions that must arise, especially in our relations with the French war office, which controlled practically all industrial facilities and transportation, it was War Minister Paul Painlevé's idea that there should be a group of French officers placed at our disposal.

Marshal Joffre was designated as head of this liaison group. The instructions received by Marshal Joffre

from the minister of war were transmitted to me in a polite note. Naturally, it was pleasing to think of being associated with Marshal Joffre, but I thought the adoption of the plan at this time would only add an extra channel through which requests must pass and that this would complicate rather than simplify matters.

The scheme indicated that a sort of tutelage was contemplated, which also made it objectionable.

In my opinion, it would be more expedient to utilize the French officers on duty at my headquarters and develop a workable system through experience. I explained my views to M. Painlevé and readily arranged for the officers of our supply department to confer directly with the chiefs of the corresponding bureaus of the French organization. But this was only the beginning and we soon found that we had much to learn of the difficulties of dealing with French bureaus, either directly or indirectly.

There was no question that under the great enthusiasm the afternoon of our arrival there existed serious dependency among all classes. The terrible strain of the previous years of continuous fighting, with heavy losses, was telling against both the French and the British. Temporary success in different theaters of war had brought small comforts, followed as they had been all too frequently by disastrous reverses.

With actual conditions in mind, one could fully understand why the allies had been so insistent that a contingent of American troops be immediately sent to France to bolster their morale. While not yet prepared to do any fighting, we could and did furnish men for service behind the lines. We also provided raw material and certain manufactured supplies as rapidly as possible and financial aid without stint.

### U. S. Inaction Shows Effect.

The more serious the situation in France, the more deplorable the loss of time by our inaction at home appeared. It is true that a committee at the war college in February had presented a brief outline report on the organization of a limited force, yet no comprehensive general plan had been considered for the formation or employment of such a force, much less for a larger one.

It was finally decided we should use the ports of Bordeaux and St. Nazaire. It was likewise estimated that the rail lines leading to the Lorraine sector, with collateral routes available, could be improved to meet our needs.

Then it became necessary to determine the sector where our forces, fighting as a unit, would be most effective. After lengthy study and consultation with allied leaders it was logical to

conclude that from the purely military standpoint the employment of the American armies on the Lorraine front would prove the most beneficial. In conference with General Petaín, who had reached the same conclusion, the decision was made accordingly.

It was necessary to have a particular sector in mind to plan definitely and construct requisite rail and distributing facilities. It was tentatively understood between General Petaín and myself that the American sector should include the St. Mihiel salient. I suggested that the first American offensive would naturally be its reduction. He fully agreed.

### Place of Red Cross Decided.

Maj. Grayson M. P. Murphy, head of the Red Cross in France, and his assistant, James H. Perkins, called at my headquarters June 17 to discuss co-operation with the army. It was decided the Red Cross could best handle its work if given a semi-official status, so Major Murphy was attached to my headquarters.

It was the French situation that gave me the gravest concern. Pacifist sentiment was prevalent in France and in many quarters there was talk of a peace parley. This pessimistic and despondent mood of the people further depressed the morale of their armies as men at the front contemplated another winter of suffering and distress for their families.

To help meet these conditions I suggested to Major Murphy that the first task of the Red Cross should be to aid needy French people. As a result he and Perkins proposed that funds be distributed to soldiers' families wherever necessary.

When the idea was presented to General Petaín he expressed the keenest appreciation and at once undertook through his military organization to obtain the necessary data. The Red Cross arranged to make 5,000,000 francs (nearly \$1,000,000) available to be distributed by local charitable agencies as rapidly as the information could be furnished as to where funds should be sent.

### Sees First Troops Arrive.

I went to St. Nazaire June 28 to meet the advance elements of the first division and inspect the port.

The first section of the first division convoy had brought to St. Nazaire headquarters, the Sixteenth Infantry, two battalions of the Twenty-eighth Infantry, one battalion of the Fifth Marines and some motor transport troops and stevedores. To see the naval vessels and transports flying the American flag in the harbor gave us all a thrill of pride. It was a pleasure to meet the naval commander, Rear Admiral Albert Gleaves, who was to have general charge of the convoy system.

The regiments of the division had all served under my command at one time or another. They were now, however, composed of a large percentage of recruits and would have to go through a long period of training. After a few days spent in the cantonment at St. Nazaire the infantry of the division was sent to the training area of Gondrecourt, north of Neufchâteau, and the artillery to Valdishon, near Belfort.

### Arrival "Tipped Off."

Maj. Gen. William L. Sibert, who had won distinction as an engineer in the construction of the Panama canal, was in command of the first division.

The two infantry brigades were commanded by Brig. Gens. R. L. Bullard and Omar Bundy, both of whom had many years of line service behind them. I had known all three of the general officers, as we were cadets together at the academy, although all belonged to classes ahead of mine.

It had been arranged that the regulations restricting reference to the allied armies by the press should apply to the American forces. But to my utter surprise the French and British papers, in their eagerness to let their people know that the elements of the American army had really reached France, carried full accounts of the arrival of this convoy, giving the port of debarkation, the designation of units and the number of men.

### Tighten on Censorship.

The publication of this piece of news was in open contravention of the censorship rules and called for immediate steps to prevent further infractions. My vigorous protest resulted in our placing in the French press bureau an American representative, to whom all matter regarding our army was to be submitted for approval.

There is no doubt, however, that the suppression of news prevented our people from obtaining a clear and contemporaneous conception of the great and often brilliant achievements of our armies and left such knowledge to be gleaned from meager accounts by participants or from the later writing of historians. It was unfortunate that such rules had to be enforced, as otherwise much that might have been published at the time may never be known, but there was nothing else to be done without serious risk.

### CHAPTER VII

As the French authorities wished to honor our national holiday they requested that some of our troops parade in Paris July 4, 1917. We were not prepared to make much of a military impression, as our men were largely recruits. But to stimulate morale the French wanted to demonstrate that the Americans were actually coming, so a battalion of the Sixteenth Infantry was brought up from Saint Nazaire.

The untrained, awkward appearance of this unit, which was accepted as the cream of our regular army by the French officials, no doubt tended to confirm their belief that it would be some time before we should be able to organize an effective army.

If they could have foreseen the triumph of this same battalion at the



Parade of the First American Troops in Paris.

peak of the great counter-offensive on the field of Soissons just one year later we might have been spared many delays and difficulties in carrying out our plans.

### Troops Bring Joy to French.

Nevertheless, the first appearance of American combat troops in Paris brought joyful acclaim from the people. On the march the battalion was accompanied by a great crowd, many women forcing their way into the ranks and swinging along arm in arm with the men. With wreaths about their necks and flowers in their hats and on their rifles, the column had the appearance of a moving flower garden.

With only a semblance of military formation the animated throng pushed its way through avenues of people to the martial strains of the French band and the still more thrilling music of cheering voices. Many dropped on their knees in reverence as the column went by.

The battalion marched to the cemetery where the tomb of Lafayette is located. The ceremony there consisted of a few speeches, the principal speaker being Brand Whitlock, our ambassador to Belgium. I had been asked to deliver an address but had designated Col. C. E. Stanton of my staff, an old army friend and something of an orator, to speak in my place. However, I prevailed upon to speak extemporaneously.

### "Lafayette, We Are Here!"

It was on this occasion that utterance was given to an expression that could be born only of inspiration, one that will live long in history: "Lafayette, we are here!"

Many have attributed this striking utterance to me, and I have often wished it could have been mine. But I have no recollection of saying anything so splendid. I am sure those words were spoken by Colonel Stanton, and to him must go the credit for so happy and felicitous a phrase.

The parade of our troops through Paris doubtless fortified the morale of the people to a certain extent, but we all knew that eventually something very much more effective would have to be done.

The real question was whether the allies could hold out until we were ready. It was clear that no halfway measures on our part would answer and that allied hopes lay in American military assistance on a vast scale at the earliest moment.

### Cables for 1,000,000 Men.

The allies thought an American force of 500,000 men the maximum that we could have in France in 1918, but in my opinion that would not be enough to meet the situation. If we could have had half a million fighting men in France in the early spring it would have been a different matter.

But looking ahead it was necessary to allow from 35 to 40 per cent for the services of supply, which would leave out of this number only approximately 300,000 fighting troops. Although this would aid, we could not be content merely to lend a helping hand but must prepare to strike a decisive blow.

While the appearance on the front of any American force was still months away, yet there was little doubt that if we could induce allied co-operation we should be able to give much greater assistance than they believed possible. Our study having confirmed the correctness of my tentative estimate made on the Baltic, I therefore called Washington, July 6, as follows:

"Plans should contemplate sending over at least 1,000,000 men by next May. . . . This estimate would give practically half million men for trenches. Inasmuch as question affects all allies whose common interests demand that we exert maximum military power consistent with transport problem, suggest early agreement be reached among allies which would provide requisite transportation . . . and limit sea transportation to food and military supplies and the exclusion of every kind of luxury as well as other supplies in excess of immediate needs of countries dependent upon overseas supplies."

### Question of Transportation.

The question was, therefore, one of sea transportation, but so far all efforts to get the allies, especially the British, to consider giving help to bring over men and supplies had been futile. They did not seem to realize that America would be practically negligible from a military standpoint unless they could provide some shipping. Nor did they seem to appreciate that time

distinguished from the purely military task, men with expert knowledge and broad experience in business, industry and transportation would be needed.

In the technical branches of the army there were many officers with theoretical training in special lines, but with some notable exceptions they generally lacked broad constructive or administrative experience. From the very start I determined to obtain the best talent available, and was fortunate in practically every field to find able men who were anxious to do their part.

The earliest application of the principle was in connection with timber and lumber procurement. The call for lumber would be enormous, and since it would be impossible with our limited tonnage to bring a great quantity across the Atlantic, most of it would have to be obtained in Europe.

A cable to the War department early in July, 1917, recommended the immediate organization of a forestry service, consisting of sawmill units, to be composed of experienced lumbermen and 8,000 to 10,000 unskilled laborers to build roads and transport lumber. Special request was made for the appointment of Prof. Henry Graves, chief of the United States forestry service, who was then on the ground, as the man to take charge of this service. A number of other specially qualified men were requested as we entered the task of building up the supply service, but as this was the first intimation given to the War department that such a force would be needed naturally it was some time before it was actually at work.

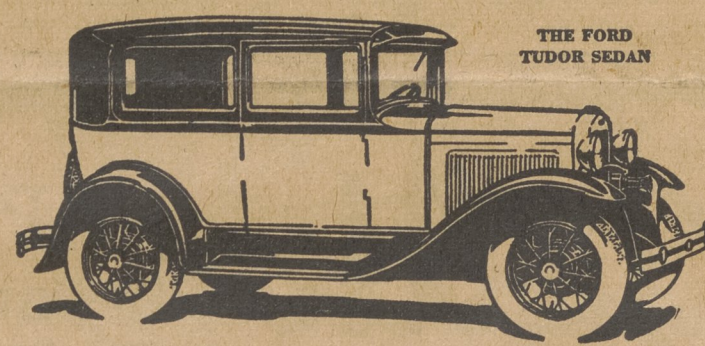
(Continued Next Week)

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