

My Experiences in the World War

By General John J. Pershing

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W. N. U.
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New British Offensive.

Immobilized by the mud of Flanders, where British attacks had continued intermittently from the end of July to the middle of November, with rather excessive losses, the British commander in chief turned to a more southerly portion of his line for the final offensive of the year. Choosing the Cambrai front on which to launch the effort, careful preparations, including the concentration of an unusual number of tanks, were made to insure a break through the enemy's defenses. The tanks and the infantry were to make an opening through which the cavalry was to pass and attack the flanks of the enemy. Then French troops held in readiness in the vicinity were to follow. As to the question of command of these combined forces when both should become engaged it was to be left to the senior general officer in the vicinity, who might be either French or British. In going over these plans it seemed to me that their idea of securing co-operation after the French should begin participation was rather vague.

During the day we first went to visit General Byng, commanding the third army, who explained further details of the attack and the progress already made. He and his chief of staff were busy receiving news from the front and felt that all was going well.

British Victory Spurs Allies.
The attack was made on a six-mile front and the British had the advantage from the outset. The sudden debouchment of the long line of tanks, closely followed by the infantry, all without the usual warning of long preliminary artillery bombardment, completely surprised the Germans. The tanks broke wide gaps in the wire and subdued the machine-gun nests, aiding the infantry through the defenses with a minimum of loss.

The front was rather narrow, considering the depth of the objectives. A maximum gain of some four and a half miles was secured the first day, and a greater result was prevented, it was said, by a serious check to the tanks at Flesquieres.

For some reason or other the French were not called into action, but presumably it was because the British cavalry, which was to precede them, could not go forward as planned. The offensive continued for two or three days longer with varying success. It was, however, a decided victory, and, while not as great as the British expected, it gave encouragement to the allies on the western front and no doubt helped to offset temporarily the depressing effect of the serious defeat recently sustained by the Italian army.

CHAPTER XXII

An American mission headed by Col. E. M. House arrived in France toward the end of November for an interallied conference. Other members of the mission were Admiral W. S. Benson; Gen. Tasker H. Bliss, chief of staff; Oscar T. Crosby, for the Treasury department; Vance McCormick, chairman of the war trade board; Bainbridge Colby, shipping board; Alonzo E. Taylor, Thomas N. Perkins, war industries, and Paul Cravath.

As the representatives of different nationalities gathered in Paris recent reports of decreasing losses of ocean tonnage and greater destruction of German submarines, with prospects of still further improvement, seemed to give more of hopefulness in the general situation and allied spirits were somewhat revived.

The British had won at Cambrai and were making satisfactory progress in their advance on Jerusalem, which, it was said, would be facilitated by the use of their new base at Jaffa. The Italians seemed to have recovered their morale to a limited extent, with the stiffening of their lines by British and French divisions, and had successfully held their own against the Austrian attack on the Piave.

Not the least hopeful thing was the step just taken toward unity of command in the creation of the supreme war council. But the decisive factor in the whole situation, if it could be utilized in time, was the tremendous economical and physical power of the

United States. To make that available before it was too late was the problem upon the solution of which depended the success of the allied cause. Would the allies see it and would they work together to solve it?

Interallied Conference.
When all were seated around the table in the assembly room at the ministry of foreign affairs Prime Minister Clemenceau, who presided, spoke briefly, setting forth the importance of the gathering and the necessity of translating the noble spirit of the alliance into action. No attempts at oratory were in evidence, nor was there prolonged discourse on any subject. Naturally questions concerning available man power, shipping, munitions and supplies were mentioned, but only in a general way. The conference did little more than agree that the study of the various subjects should be left to committees composed of interallied representatives.

It was very clear that everybody was looking to America to provide the additional man power needed to give the allies superiority. None was more eager to increase our forces than ourselves, but on my part every possible argument to procure shipping had been presented to the allies and to our War department, so when the conference urged the expedition of our forces it made the strongest kind of a case in favor of immediate increase of allied aid in tonnage.

For some time reliance upon the allies for any considerable amount of tonnage had seemed almost in vain, and it looked as though we should have to depend upon our own limited resources for most of it. The British were giving some assistance in the transportation of men. American ships had carried up to November 1, 67,218 and the British 54,751.

Our Engineers in Fight.
The results of the British success at Cambrai were not to be permanent, as the Germans quickly retaliated. General von Marwitz hastily assembled a force of some fifteen divisions, and November 30 suddenly launched a violent counterattack. The British were short of reserves, and before Von Marwitz was stopped his troops had regained most of the lost ground.

It was in this operation that a detachment of our Eleventh regiment of engineers became engaged while serving with the British. The men, to the number of 280, were at work in the Gauzacourt railway yard when the Germans attacked. One officer and nine men were wounded, and the detachment withdrew. They were then given arms and fought with the British.

War Council Meets Again.

The second conference of the supreme war council was held at Versailles December 1. Our representatives, political and military, at this meeting were Mr. House and General Bliss, respectively. At the opening session M. Clemenceau drew attention to the general situation, referring especially to the collapse of Russia, the probable release of enemy troops from that front, the adverse situation in Italy, the depletion of allied man power, and the reliance of the allies on American assistance.

The premier enjoined the military representatives "to bear in mind that their function is to advise the supreme war council as a whole and not merely as representatives of their respective nations on the council, and that they should view the problems confronting them not from a national standpoint but from that of the allies as a whole."

The military representatives at this conference were instructed to examine the military situation and report their recommendations as to the future plan of operations; to study the immediate situation in Italy from the offensive as well as from the defensive point of view, and to report on the utilization of the Belgian army.

It was evident that this body was to become a kind of superparliament not only for the discussion of resources, aims and purposes, but for the determination of policies looking to concert of action in support of the military efforts. The spirit in which

the problems were approached at this meeting made it clear that the supreme war council would sensibly promote co-operation among the powers. The second meeting of the interallied conference December 3 closed its sessions. None of the questions brought before the first session could be settled, but they were taken up by the more permanent body, the supreme war council, which, as time went on, undertook to co-ordinate the work of the various committees that had been forced to handle the problems involved.

CHAPTER XXIII

A large party, including Col. E. M. House, the American delegates to the interallied conference, Ambassador William G. Sharp and Lord Northcliffe, went by special train from Paris December 4, 1917, to our training area, stopping at my Chaumont headquarters en route.

On the train I had an interesting conversation with Lord Northcliffe of the British air board regarding the formation of an American army and its transportation overseas. Lord Northcliffe thought his government should do more to help with shipping, but, like most Englishmen, he believed it best for us to send our men for service with the British. He ar-

gued in favor of a proposal that Lloyd George had recently made to Mr. House, that we should incorporate in their units any infantry that we might not be able to organize immediately into complete divisions of our own.

"It is all very well," I said, "to make such an appeal to us, but it is impossible to ignore our national viewpoint. The people themselves would not approve, even though the President and his advisers should lean that way. We cannot permit our men to serve under another flag except in an extreme emergency, and then only temporarily."

I also insisted that we would contribute more largely to allied success by the use of the American army as a unit.

Hits Fault Finders.

About this time Mr. House told me that Petain had criticized the American ideas of training and also that Louis Loucheur, minister of munitions, had spoken about the rise in prices caused by American purchases. Mr. House wisely suggested to these gentlemen, he said, that matters of this kind were for me to settle.

I called without delay on M. Clemenceau and told him of the reports and explained my understanding about training agreements with Petain and also the steps that had previously

been taken by the purchasing board, in co-operation with his own bureaus, to prevent the rise in prices. I also told him that French dealers were largely to blame if prices had risen, as we had eliminated competition among ourselves and that our purchases were and had been for some time actually handled through French officials.

I objected to these back-door methods of lodging complaints and emphasized the necessity of frankness and directness in all our dealings. I asked him to give instructions that if there was any fault to find with our methods it should be brought to my personal attention. He entirely agreed with me and expressed chagrin and surprise that any other course had been followed. On the face of it there was no other conclusion, however, than that both complaints were made for the purpose of finding out just the extent of my independent authority.

Gets Apology From Petain.

I took occasion a few days later to let Petain know very politely what I thought of the impropriety of this sort of thing and also criticized him then

and there for telling anybody, even Mr. House, as he had done, about the plan to attack the St. Mihiel salient as the first offensive by the American

army. I was pleased with Petain's apology and his statement that there would be no further criticism of this kind on his part.

As a matter of fact, I think the French erroneously regarded House as a sort of special ambassador, and thought that they could lay the foundation for an approach through him to the question of amalgamation.

Just before his return to the States House said to me that he entirely agreed with me, and that he felt sure the President and secretary of war intended to leave the whole question regarding the disposition of our troops to my judgment. Assurance on this point was in no sense necessary, as I had full confidence that this was the case.

During his stay in France I formed a high opinion of House's ability. We formed a friendship in the beginning, which enabled us to discuss all matters most freely and frankly. Before he left for home he and I arranged for confidential communication by cable should it become necessary to reach Mr. Baker or Mr. Wilson direct.

The Missing Turkeys.

Immediately upon my return to headquarters at Chaumont December 7, 1917, General Harbord reported

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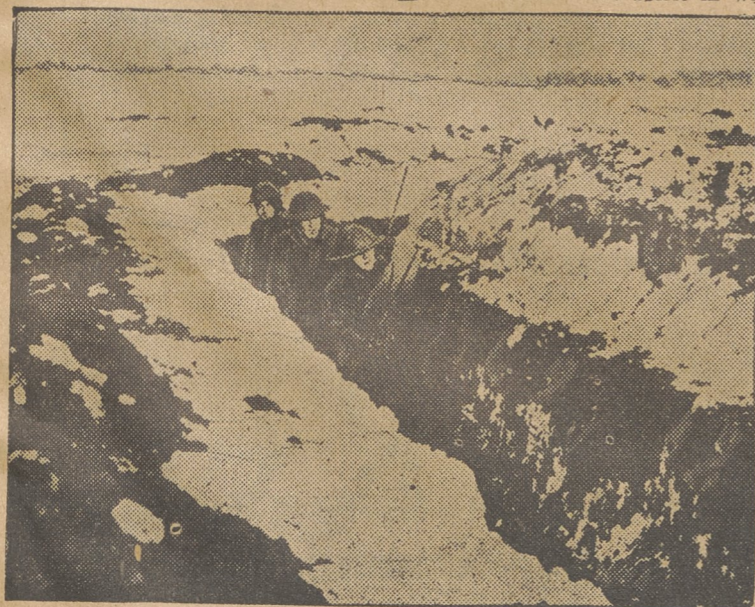
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