

## My Experiences in the World War

By General John J. Pershing

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V. N. U.  
Service

### No Idea of Ending War in 1918.

No one suggested that the plans of the moment or those to follow might be carried so far as to terminate the war in 1918. Concerning the part each should play Foch asked expressions of opinion of the respective commanders in chief as to how these or any other operations we might propose should be conducted.

Marshal Haig gave his views and plans, which agreed with the general outline suggested, as did General Petain, who wanted further to consider the possibilities. As far as these preliminary operations applied to the Americans, they were simply a restatement of the plans we had been leading up to ever since our entry into the war. I, therefore, advised that details of organization and supply were receiving every consideration in the preparation of the American army to do its part.

While at General Foch's headquarters I arranged with General Petain for the expansion of the First corps, then operating in the Marne sector, by which four American divisions were to be placed in the line with two in reserve. It was my hope that this would be the basis for the preliminary formation of an American army on this front. En route to Chaumont I stopped to call on Liggett and apprise him of the possibility of additional American divisions for his corps.

### Expedition to Russia.

The supreme war council was prone to listen to suggestions for the use of allied troops at various places other than the western front. One of these, on which the British seemed to be especially insistent, was to send troops to help the so-called white army in Russia, to keep open the communication through Murmansk in the Arch-

I was opposed to any such idea, as it would simply mean scattering our resources, all of which were needed on the western front. But President Wilson was prevailed upon to help and I was directed to send a regiment provided General Foch had no objections. As apparently he had already considered the question, he gave his approval and a regiment was accordingly sent. The Three Hundred Thirty ninth infantry, Lieut. Col. George E. Stewart commanding, together with one battalion of engineer and one field hospital, were designated for this service.

### First Field Army.

In view of the prospect for the early assembly of corps and divisions to form our army, it became urgent that the organization be hastened with all possible speed. The outlines had been determined and members of the First army staff were at work on the details.

My formal order creating the First field army was issued July 24, to take effect August 10, with headquarters at La Ferte-sous-Jouarre.

Immediate consideration was given the improvement of the general supply system. Although the recent reorganization had helped, it had been my purpose for some time to make changes in personnel in the S. O. S., particularly in the position of chief, which demanded great administrative ability. After much thought the choice fell to General Harbord. His knowledge of organization, his personality, his energy and his loyalty made him the outstanding choice. Reluctance to lose his services in command of troops, where he had shown himself a brilliant leader, caused me to delay until his division could be relieved from the active front.

### CHAPTER LIII

Early in August, 1918, I made an inspection tour of the service of supply, to note the progress and acquaint myself, the chief of staff and General Harbord, by actual observations, with conditions.

The tour was made also with a view to such changes in personnel and improvements in methods as would insure complete fulfillment of the increased obligations imposed upon the service of supply by the tremendous task of receiving, storing and transporting the enlarged troop and supply shipments.

Our first stop was Tours, which, being the location of the headquarters of the S. O. S., with a huge American military garrison of 2,400 officers and 4,800 men, had become a beehive of activity.

We visited every activity at Tours, beginning with the central records office, a branch of the adjutant general's office of large proportions, where the personal records of every man in the A. E. F. were kept. We found that the railway operators, numbering thousands, comfortably situated in portable barracks at Camp de Grasse, were putting every energy into the service. Certain engineer troops were kept at this central point for railway work, ready to respond to calls from any direction. The well-managed camp of German prisoners, under Colonel Groome of the military police, contained several hundred men used as laborers.

A number of British women, known as the Women's Auxiliary Aid corps, were lent to us by their government to

assist in clerical work. The 250 women located at Tours occupied neat and comfortable temporary barracks and presented a very military appearance on parade. Some fifty of them were ill in quarters at the time and I gave instructions that they should be transferred to our hospital. Besides officially, these fine women, under the proper restrictions that prevailed, became a valued addition to the social side of life where they were stationed. This force with us eventually numbered about 5,000.

### Speaks to Men in Hospital.

The base hospital at Tours was then filled with men wounded in the recent engagements. They were receiving the best of care under Col. A. M. Smith and his efficient group of medical officers and nurses.

Passing through the various wards of this hospital I spoke to a fine-looking young soldier who was sitting up in bed, and asked him where he was wounded, meaning to inquire the nature of his wound. In reply he said: "Do you remember, sir, just where the road skirts a small grove and turns to the left, across a wheatfield and then leads up over the brow of the hill? Well, right there, sir."

He was clearly describing the advance south of Soissons which pierced the Chateau Thierry salient. Of course, I was not there at the time, but it touched me that he should feel that I must have been very close to him.

At the base hospital in Bordeaux, then under the efficient supervision of Col. H. A. Shaw, chief surgeon of the base section, we found about 500 of our wounded, most of them soon to be sent home. No matter how severely wounded they were I never heard a word of complaint from any of our men. There could not have been found in the hospitals of any army a more cheerful lot. It was a lesson in fortitude, an inspiration, to see their fine courage. Some would never again see, others would never be able to walk again, but they all seemed proud of their sacrifice, which many of their countrymen are often prone to forget all too soon.

We arrived at Brest August 2 and found the commanding general, G. H. Harries, and staff at the station to meet us. Base section No. 5 was built around Brest, our leading port of debarkation. The section included four French territorial departments. Another landing port for troops was Cherbourg. A large locomotive terminal and repair shop were located at Rennes and a coal port at Granville.

### Major O'Neil's Secret.

After an inspection of the storehouses and the construction for additional storage on the piers, I asked for the chief stevedore, Major O'Neil, who came up apparently quite embarrassed. To put him at ease I took him by the arm and we walked together to where some lighters were being unloaded. As the port had made the record of handling 42,000 arriving troops and their baggage in one day, May 24, entirely with lighters, I asked him to tell me about it.

By this time he had overcome his fright, and pointing to two officers, each down in the bottom of a lighter directing the work, he said:

"Sir, do you see those two captains down there in their shirt sleeves? Well, that's the secret. I say to them: 'Don't stand off somewhere and puff your selves up in your uniforms, but take off Sam Brownes and your coats and get down close to your men.'"

"Of course, those captains have now become experts. I did the same thing when I started, but since they are trained I manage things generally and they carry out my orders. I can wear my uniform now that I have won the right to wear it."

"Well," I said, "O'Neil, you're just the man I have been looking for, and I am going to send you to every port we use to show them your secret."

### CHAPTER LIV

The French government had expressed a desire to bestow their decorations on American officers and men, and asked if I would accept an appointment in the Legion of Honor with the grade of grand officer.

As congress had recently granted permission for members of our forces to receive foreign decorations, the French government was advised accordingly, and it was to confer this honor upon me that President Poincare paid his brief visit to Chaumont August 6, 1918.

I met him at the station with a military escort and conducted him to my headquarters, where the senior officers of the staff were presented. After that formality we repaired to the small area of barracks, where the headquarters troop and band were drawn up in line for the ceremony.

I was not insensible to the high personal honor, but regarded it mainly as an appreciation on the part of the French government of the assistance America had already given to the cause.

### Pershing Takes Command.

As the American army was now an accomplished fact, it seemed advisable to begin preparations immediately to carry out the plan of campaign adopted July 24, providing for a distinctive American operation against the St.

Mihiel salient.

I motored to Sarcus August 9, and after discussing with Marshal Foch the changed situation in the Marne sector and the practical stabilization of the front on the Vesle, I suggested the transfer of the First army headquarters to the St. Mihiel region, where it could begin immediate preparations for the proposed offensive. We considered the outline of my plans and without hesitation Marshal Foch acquiesced in the transfer.

Returning to Paris the same afternoon I went to Provins to talk the matter over further with General Petain. We took stock of available divisions for the St. Mihiel operation, and he said I could count on him definitely to do everything in his power to furnish whatever we might require.

Having thus reached a general understanding regarding the preliminary details of the move, I drove the following morning to La Ferte-sous-Jouarre to take formal command of the First army and to give instructions to my staff regarding the movement of headquarters to Neufchateau.

### Bell's Division in Action.

The Thirty-third division (Bell) was still with the British when the combined attack of the British Fourth and the French First armies in the Montdidier-Albert sector began August 8. The division was in front line

training with the British Fourth army and was attached to the British Third corps for the operation, the One Hundred and Thirty-first regiment of infantry being assigned to the British Fifty-eighth division. This regiment joined in the attack August 9 against the Morlancourt-Chippilly spur north of the Somme. It reached its objectives in splendid fashion and occupied a line on the western edge of Gressaire wood, extending southward along the river.

August 10, it continued to progress against decided opposition, gaining the eastern edge of the forests of Fosse and Marcon. During the following three days, the command having been shifted, the One Hundred and Thirty-first infantry under the Australian Fourth division attained a line just west of Bray-sur-Somme. The three other regiments were in reserve during the operations. The One Hundred and Thirty-first infantry was relieved August 20, having advanced over three miles and suffered heavy casualties.

I motored to the British front Sunday to be present at Thirty-third division headquarters, near Mollens-aux-Bois, on the occasion of the visit of King George, who was then visiting his armies. General Bliss had preceded me and we both spent the night there. That evening General Bell, relating the details of the participation of his troops with the British, said their services had been urgently re-

quested and that they had acquitted themselves well.

### King George Bestows Decorations.

The king arrived August 12, to present decorations to selected men of the Thirty-third division, who had participated in the recent attacks of the British army. Soon after his arrival the king invited General Bliss and me to his room, where he presented me with the Grand Cross of the Order of St. Michael and bestowed the Order of St. Michael and St. George on General Bliss. The presentations were informal, as the king simply handed the decorations to us in turn, at the same time expressing his appreciation of American assistance.

We then accompanied the king to the place where the men were assembled for the ceremony. He was gracious in his compliments as he pinned the decorations on our men, and the recipients were extremely proud.

### CHAPTER LV

The final decision that the First American army would undertake the reduction of the St. Mihiel salient as its first operation was transmitted to army headquarters August 10 and the army staff immediately began the development of plans for the concentration of the necessary troops for its execution.

It was certain the psychological effect on the enemy of our success in

this first operation by the American army as well as on the allies, our own troops and our people at home would be of great importance. The attack must, therefore, not only succeed, but a serious hostile reaction must be made impossible.

The headquarters of the First army were removed to Neufchateau between August 11 and 16. The special army troops assembled north of Chateau Thierry were moved eastward during the same period.

### Composition of First Army.

The following corps and divisions were placed at the disposal of the First army for the St. Mihiel operation and their condition may be summarized as follows:

The First and Second divisions were excellent as to training, equipment and morale. They had attacked July 18 in the Soissons drive.

The Third, Fourth, Twenty-sixth and Forty-second divisions were of fine morale and considerable experi-

ence, as they had fought in the defense about Chateau Thierry and in the advance toward the Vesle river.

The Eighty-ninth and Ninetieth divisions were going through their sector training on the front between Toul and the Moselle river and the Fifth and Thirty-fifth divisions were taking their sector training in the Vosges.

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