

# My EXPERIENCES in the WORLD WAR

By GENERAL JOHN J. PERSHING, Commander-in-Chief of the American Expeditionary Forces

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## CHAPTER IV

My first and my only meeting with President Wilson until after the armistice occurred on May 24, 1917, when I called on him with Secretary of War Baker. After some conversation with Mr. Baker on shipping, Mr. Wilson turned to me.

"General, we are giving you some difficult tasks these days," said the President.

"Perhaps so," I replied, "but that is what we are trained to expect, Mr. President."

The President then mentioned my experience in Mexico and inquired about my acquaintance with France. I had expected him to say something about the part our army should play in the war, but he said nothing.

### Promised Full Support

Upon leaving, I said: "Mr. President, I appreciate the honor you have conferred upon me by the assignment you have given me, and I realize the responsibilities it entails, but you can count upon the best that is in me."

To this the President replied: "General, you were chosen entirely upon your record, and I have every confidence that you will succeed; you shall have my full support."

The President then asked me to convey to the King of England and to the President of France his greetings and best wishes. His manner was cordial with his poise and his air of determination.

His assurance of confidence in me was gratifying, but in the difficult situations that arose later regarding the manner of aiding the Allies, he was inclined to yield to the persistent importunities of the Allied representatives in Washington.

In the actual conduct of operations I was given entire freedom, and in this respect was to enjoy an experience unique in the history of American wars.

### Letter Making Him Chief

May 27, 1917, the day before I was to sail from New York, Secretary Baker sent me a letter of instructions concerning my command, authorities and duties in Europe, which is quoted in full:

"The President directs me to communicate to you the following: "1. The President designates you to command all the land forces of the United States operating in continental Europe and in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, including any part of the Marine Corps which may be detached for service there with the army."

"2. You will proceed with your staff to Europe. Upon arrival in Great Britain, France or any other country at war with the imperial German government, you will at once place yourself in communication with the American embassy and through its agency with the authorities of any country to which the forces of the United States may be sent."

"3. You are invested with the authority and duties devolved by the law, regulations, orders and customs of the United States upon the commander of any army in the field in time of war and with the authority and duties in like manner devolved upon department commanders in peace and war, including the special authorities and duties assigned to the commander of the Philippine Department, in so far as the same are applicable to the particular circumstances of your command."

"4. You will establish, after consultation with the French war office, all necessary bases, lines of communication, depots, etc., and make all the incidental arrangements essential to active participation at the front."

"5. In military operations against the imperial German government you are directed to cooperate with forces of the other countries employed against the enemy; but in so doing the underlying idea must be kept in view that the forces of the United States are a separate and distinct component of the combined forces, the identity of which must be preserved. This fundamental rule is subject to such minor exceptions in particular circumstances as your judgment may approve. The decision as to when your command, or any of its parts, is ready for action is confided to you, and you will exercise full discretion in determining the manner of co-operation. But, until the forces of the United States are, in your judgment, sufficiently strong to warrant operations as an independent command, it is understood that you will co-operate as a component of whatever army you may be assigned to by the French government."

"6. You will keep the department fully advised of all that concerns your command and will communicate your recommendations freely and directly to the department. And in general you are vested with all necessary authority to carry on the war vigorously in harmony with the spirit of these instructions and toward a victorious conclusion."

(Signed) "NEWTON D. BAKER."

Party Sails in Secrecy  
On the date of my sailing, May 28, 1917, my party assembled at

Governors Island, New York. All had been instructed to proceed with the utmost secrecy, even wearing civilian clothes until they were aboard the steamship Baltic.

Although we ourselves stole silently out through the fog and down the bay, the large number of quartermasters and other officers stationed near New York, rushing around in uniform rather ostentatiously that day really amounted to an announcement something out of the ordinary was happening.

But it must be said to the credit of the press representatives that they were most discreet, as the papers generally published nothing about us until we were in Europe.

During the voyage most of my time was spent in conference with the heads of staff departments regarding their duties and plans.

### In the Danger Zone

June 6 the Baltic began to zig-zag and we realized we were in the danger zone. Next morning an escort of two American destroyers gave us something of a thrill and fully restored confidence. No submarines were observed, however, and the weather was perfect throughout the voyage.

We steamed into Liverpool June 8. A cordial reception awaited us, with a guard of honor from the Royal Welch Fusiliers. This selection had a sentimental significance in that the regiment not only fought against us at Bunker Hill but fought beside us during the Boxer rebellion in China. As we stepped off the gangplank the band played "The Star-Spangled Banner" to welcome us, this being the first time in history that an American army ever was received officially in England.

A royal coach attached to a special train took our party to London. At Euston station we were welcomed by Lord Derby, secretary of state for war; Field Marshal Sir John French, General Lord Brooke, Walter Hines Page, the American ambassador, Admiral William S. Sims, and many other British and American officials.

### King George Not Optimistic

I was received by King George at Buckingham Palace on June 9. His Majesty was in the uniform of a field marshal and he talked with me in democratic fashion for a few minutes before the other senior members of my staff were presented. The

fare was quite in keeping with the food situation throughout England. After luncheon the King, the ambassador and I stood near a window overlooking the garden which, his Majesty explained, instead of growing flowers, was producing potatoes. The King told of the Kaiser's visit to London a few years before and how he had brought his chief of secret service along and put him up at one of the hotels to learn all he could while the Kaiser himself was a guest at Buckingham Palace.

His Majesty spoke bitterly of the inhumanity of the Germans, dwelling especially on the night bombing of London. Pointing to the beautiful statue of Queen Victoria just outside the window, the King suddenly exclaimed: "The Kaiser, God damn him, has even tried to destroy the statue of his own grandmother."

For a moment I was surprised at his words, but I quickly realized that it was a solemn expression of profound indignation, and not profanity.

Calls on Chief of Staff  
After leaving the palace I called on General Sir William Robertson, chief of the imperial general staff. He was a rugged, heavy-set, blunt soldier, of Scotch descent, whose record in the army had been exceptional in that he had risen from the grade of private to his then high position.

As he sipped his tea I explained our plan for the organization of our armies by using the small regular force and the National Guard as a nucleus. As the British themselves had gone through the same experience two years before, I stressed the fact that it would take considerable time.

Like all the British officials, he was much in favor of having our forces serve with or near their own. He pointed out that we were both Anglo-Saxons, spoke the same language, and gave other reasons to support his views.

It seemed necessary to explain in detail that as the American army was working with the British navy we should probably plan to place our army beside the French if there was to be any preference. It appeared logical that we should do this, as we were to operate on French soil, and use French ports, railways and material. The main thing, I went on to say, was to form our own army as soon as possible for use wherever it seemed best.

No British Aid in Shipping  
I emphasized our lack of tonnage and told him that we must have additional shipping if we were to bring over an army worth while, but his reaction to this was not encouraging. He said he thought it was entirely out of the question for them to provide us with any British shipping, as they were already in sore straits to find vessels for their own national necessities.

I called on Mr. David Lloyd George, the prime minister. He went right to the point and asked when troops would be organized and trained and the numbers we expected to send over. He was cordial enough and expressed a desire to assist us in every possible manner, but when I stressed our need of assistance to bring over

our troops he did not seem to be particularly interested and gave little hope that the British would be able to furnish us any shipping whatever.

Under the circumstances the apparent unconcern of the British as to our need of shipping is not difficult to understand. They were seriously alarmed regarding their own food situation. It seemed to me, however, that they had allowed their pessimism to carry them too far in the direction of hopelessness. At the moment, they could see no relief for the future and no prospect of aiding us in tonnage.

Great Ovation in France  
After leave-taking calls and numerous informal visits, conferring with various leaders and making one trip to a training camp, our party left June 13 for Folkestone and France. At Boulogne we again received an impressive welcome, and a few hours later we were in Paris.

The officials who met us at the station included M. Paul Painleve, minister of war; Marshal Joseph Joffre, Rene Viviani, Major General Foch, then chief of staff, and United States Ambassador William G. Sharp. There were many others. The station was packed and the atmosphere seemed electrified with pent-up enthusiasm.

Outside dense masses lined the boulevards and filled the squares along the route to our hotel, the Crillon. Cheers and tears mingled as men and women shouted acclaim. Women climbed into our carriages screaming "Vive l'Amérique" and threw flowers until we were buried.

It was said that never before in the history of Paris had there been such an outpouring of people. I was to see it parallel when the armistice was signed and on two other occasions, once when President Wilson arrived and later when the victory parade took place, July 14, 1919.

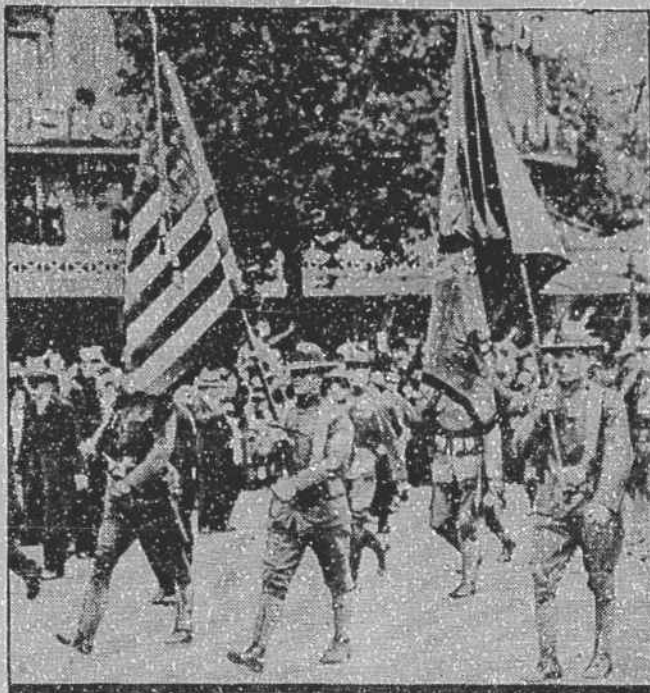
At Napoleon's Tomb  
Although I was very anxious to get to work, it was necessary for me to make certain official calls and attend a few entertainments that had been planned for us. The French suggested that we should first go to Napoleon's tomb in Les Invalides.

We were taken down to the crypt, where I was handed the great key and was asked to unlock the heavy wrought iron entrance door. We were shown uniforms and the baton that belonged to Napoleon and then his sword. Our veteran escort reverently removed the sword from the case and offered it to me, as if to transmit some of the genius of the great captain.

So much of French sentiment and tradition are associated with this tomb and its treasures that every one who visits there with Frenchmen must share their feeling of profound emotion. This incident, more than any other connected with my reception, impressed me with the martial spirit of the French people.

I called next to pay my respects to President Poincaré and to present greetings from President Wilson.

"The French people are very happy," he said, "that America is in the war. Your coming is a great satisfaction to us."



Parade of the First American Troops in Paris.

He inquired generally about our plans, seeking, as they all did, some assurance that we should soon be in the trenches. His attitude was rather formal and reserved, but he at once impressed me as a man of ability and force.

Petain "Most Agreeable"  
A visit to French general headquarters at Compiègne was made, primarily to meet General Petain and the officers of his staff. Petain 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 Petain 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 Major General Franchet d'Espèrey, then in command of a group of armies under Petain. 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 Painleve'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.

Only Beginning of Difficulties  
In my opinion, it would be more expeditious to utilize the French officers on duty at my headquarters and develop a workable system through experience. I explained my views to M. Painleve and readily arranged for the officers of our supply departments 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 dissension 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 theatres 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 man 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 more 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 Petain, 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 Petain 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  
Major Grayson M. P. Murphy, the 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 relief be distributed to soldiers' families wherever necessary.

When the idea was presented to General Petain, 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 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 the headquarters, the Sixteenth Infantry, two battalions of the 25th Infantry, one battalion of the Fifth Marines and some motor transport troops and stevedores. To see the naval transports and vessels 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 Ballbray.

Arrival "Tipped Off"  
Major General 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 Brigadier Generals 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. (Continued next week)

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Charles G. Dawes in War-time

King expressed his pleasure that America had come into the war, and dwelt upon the fact that Anglo-Saxon people were united at last in a common cause.

"The Anglo-Saxon race must save civilization," he added.

Certainly His Majesty did not appear optimistic over the outlook, and asked me numerous questions about America's preparation for war.

Leaving the palace, we went to our embassy and during an informal talk Mr. Page remarked how happy he was that America was at last in the war, and added:

"Now I am able to hold up my head and look people squarely in the eye."

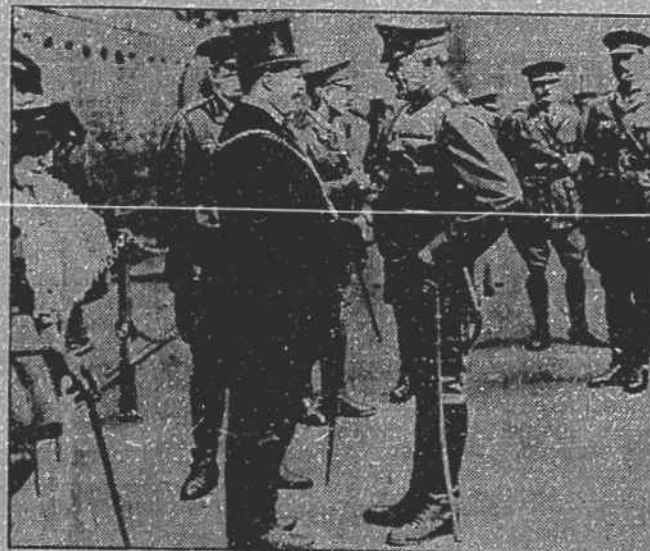
Through his service as ambassador he was beloved and honored by the British people, who admired his virile personality, but many Americans did not approve of his rather apologetic attitude toward his own country prior to our entry into the war in aid of the Allies.

Admiral Sims Not Satisfied  
I had a talk with Admiral Sims, who was not in personal command of our fleet serving with the British navy, but remained in London with an office at our embassy and directed the movements of our naval vessels, especially destroyers, from there.

He was not satisfied with the support given him from home, and complained that the Navy Department had not sent all the destroyers asked for. He said the department seemed to fear attacks along our coast and did not realize the danger to the cause in the enormous destruction of merchant shipping going on in European waters.

The admiral's report of these losses was nothing short of startling, but he thought they might be checked if he could have a sufficient number of destroyers. Without more of this class of vessels, Sims was not sanguine over the prospects of protecting our transports. However, he made it clear that every possible effort would be made to that end.

CHAPTER V  
I was a guest at luncheon at Buckingham Palace on June 11, 1917, with the American ambassador, Walter Hines Page, and Mrs. Page. The King, the Queen and Princess Mary were present. There was an air of charm and simplicity at the palace that permitted a freedom and intimacy in the conversation. The plain



Lord Mayor of London Welcoming General Pershing to British Soil.