

# My Experiences in the World War

By General John J. Pershing

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### Western Attack Slower

On the western face of the salient progress was not so satisfactory. The Twenty-sixth Division, in its attempt to make a deep advance toward Vignettes, and except for a battalion of the division reserve had not reached the day's objective.

The French at the tip of the salient, had attempted to follow up the flanks of our successful penetrations, but made only small advances. Upon the request of General E. J. Blondie, commanding the French second colonial troops, a regiment of the Thirtieth Division (Cronkhite), in reserve, was sent to his assistance.

On the afternoon of the twelfth, learning that the roads leading out of the salient between the two attacks were filled with retreating enemy troops, with their trains and artillery, I gave orders to the commanders of the Fourth and Fifth corps to push forward without delay.

Using the telephone myself, I directed the commander of the Fifth Corps to send at least one regiment of the Twenty-sixth Division toward Vignettes with all possible speed.

That evening a strong force from the Fifty-first Brigade pushed boldly forward and reached Vignettes at 2:15 a. m. the thirteenth. It immediately made dispositions that effectively closed the roads leading out of the salient west of that point. In

### All Jubilant Over Victory

On my visit to several corps and division headquarters the following day I found all jubilant over the victory and overflowing with incidents of the fighting, reciting many cases of individual heroism among the troops.

The Second Division (Lejeune) and the Eighty-ninth (Wright) both claimed the honor of capturing Thiencourt. In assigning objectives, while that village was included in the sector of the Second Division, the town was to be taken by the Eighty-ninth should it arrive first. The result was a keen rivalry between these divisions as to which should have the honor.

The two units were equally insistent in upholding their claims and I never undertook to decide the question. Distinctions in achievement among the attacking units on the southern face could not be made with any assurance, as all had done more than expected.

### CHAPTER LVIII

In accordance with the understanding of September 2 we were now moving rapidly toward our second great offensive. Questions concerning the concentration and supply of the elements of the First army in the battle areas were being worked out by the staff of that army, who were given every possible assistance by the staff at G. H. Q.



Doughboys in the Trenches in Winter Time.

the Fourth Corps the Second Brigade of the First Division resaulted in force about dawn of the thirteenth, its leading elements reaching Vignettes by 11 a. m. The salient was closed, and our troops were masters of the field.

### Could Pass Hindenburg Line

The troops continued to advance on the thirteenth, when the line was established approximately along the final objective set for this offensive. In view of the favorable situation created just west of the Moselle river by our successes, further to the left, a limited attack was made on that part of the front by elements of the Eighty-second and Ninety-third divisions, with good results.

During the night our troops all along the line were engaged in organizing their new positions for defense, preparatory to the withdrawal of divisions and corps troops for participation in the Meuse-Argonne battle, September 14, 15 and 16. Local operations continued, consisting of strong reconnaissances and occupation of better ground for defensive purposes. Beginning the thirteenth, several counterattacks were repulsed. The line was finally established west of Haudumont, Fresnoy-la-Woëvre, Doucourt, Guiny, Vandieres.

Reports received the thirteenth and fourteenth indicated that the enemy was retreating in considerable disorder. Without doubt an immediate continuation of the advance would have carried us well beyond the Hindenburg line and possibly into Metz, and the temptation to press on was very great. But we would probably have become deeply involved and delayed the greater Meuse-Argonne operation to which we were wholly committed.

Nearly 16,000 prisoners were taken and some 450 enemy guns had fallen into our hands. Our casualties numbered about 7,000. As the enemy retreated he set fire to many large supply dumps and several villages. The few remaining French inhabitants who found themselves within our lines were overjoyed to be released from the domination of the enemy, but many were left destitute by the burning of their homes at the very moment of deliverance.

On the thirteenth General Petain came by my headquarters and we went together to St. Mihiel, where the people, including children carrying French flags, gave us a welcome which may well be imagined when one realizes that they had been held as prisoners, entirely out of touch with their own countrymen, for four years, though always within sight of the French lines.

The general plan of action of the allied armies, as agreed upon at the conference of commanders in chief on the 22, was to state it simply and briefly, that the offensive should continue, each army driving forward as rapidly as possible. The allied and American operations during the summer had resulted in the reduction of the Chateau Thierry, Amiens and St. Mihiel salients and the great offensive west of the Meuse river, the battle line had remained practically unchanged since 1917. It was on this front the American army was to play its great part.

The disposition of the Belgian, the British, French and American armies on the wide front between the North Sea and Verdun was such that they would naturally converge as they advanced. So long as the enemy could hold his ground on the east of this battle line frontal attacks farther west might drive him back on his successive positions, yet a decision would be long delayed.

### Yanks Face Strong Position

The main line of communication and supply ran through Carignan, Sedan and Metziers. If that should be interrupted before we could withdraw his armies from France and Belgium, the communications in the narrow avenue between the Ardennes and the Dutch frontier were so limited that he would be unable adequately to supply his forces or to evacuate them before his ruin would be accomplished. As our objective was the Sedan-Carignan railroad, it was evident that the sector assigned to the American army was opposite the most sensitive part of the German front then being attacked.

The danger confronting the enemy made it imperative that he should hold on in front of the American army to the limit of his resources. From the enemy's point of view this was the vital portion of his defense line, because here it was closer to his main artery of supply (Carignan-Sedan-Metziers) than at any other point. He could afford to retire his armies gradually from all fronts except the Meuse-Argonne, where he must hold until the last.

### Germans Strongly Fortified

The area between the Meuse river and the Argonne forest was ideal for defensive fighting. On the east the heights of the Meuse commanded the river valley and on the west the rugged high hills of the Argonne forest dominated the valley of the Aire river. In the center the watershed between the Aire and the Meuse rivers commanded both valleys, with the heights of Montfaucon, Cunel,

Romagne and of the Bois de Barriecourt standing out as natural strong points. From these heights observation points completely covered the entire German front.

The terrain over which the attack was to be made formed a defile, blocked by three successive barriers, the heights of Montfaucon then those of Cunel and Romagne and farther back the ridges of the Bois de Barriecourt and of the Bois de Bourgoigne. The Meuse River was unfordable; the Aire river fordable only in places. In addition to the heavy forest of the Argonne there were numerous woods with heavy undergrowth which were serious obstacles.

These natural defenses were strengthened by every artificial means imaginable, such as fortified strongpoints, dugouts, successive lines of trenches and an unlimited number of concrete machine gun emplacements. With the advantage of commanding positions the enemy was particularly well located to pour oblique and flanking artillery fire on any assailant attempting to advance within range between the Meuse and the Argonne.

A dense network of wire entanglements covered every position. It was small wonder the enemy had stood four years on this front without being molested. He felt secure in the knowledge that even with few divisions to hold these positions his east and west lines of rail communication in rear would be well protected against the probability of interference.

### Hindenburg Position Is Objective

In accordance with the principal mission, which remained the same throughout this great offensive, the main attack of the First army was to be launched west of the Meuse river, its right to be covered by the river and by the operations of the French Seventeenth corps on the east of the river, that corps being a part of our army.

Our left was to be supported by a simultaneous attack by the French Fourth army. Our attack to include the Argonne forest, was to be driven with all possible strength in the general direction of Metziers.

The first operation of our army was to have for its objective the Hindenburg position on the front Briell-sur-Meuse-Romagne-sous-Montfaucon-Grandpre, with a following development in the direction of Bouzancy-Metziers in order to force the enemy beyond the Meuse and outflank his positions on the Vouziers-Rethel line from the east.

In conjunction with our advance, which would outflank the enemy's position south of the Aisne, the French Fourth army, by attacking successively the positions between the Aisne and the Suippes rivers, would be able to occupy the line Vouziers-Rethel. After that it would operate in the direction of the plateau east of the Rethel-Signy-l'Abbayes road.

A liaison attachment under the French army was designated to operate along the western edge of the Argonne forest as a connecting link between the French and American armies.

### Aim at Tactical Surprise

Our purpose was to effect a tactical surprise, if possible, overcome the enemy's first and second positions in the area of Montfaucon and (Cote Dame Marie) of his third position before the enemy could bring up strong re-enforcements. It was an ambitious plan and one that would require a rapid advance of ten miles through a densely fortified zone. From an estimate of the enemy's reserves and their location it was realized that we must capture Montfaucon and seize Cote Dame Marie by the end of the second day.

It was thought reasonable to count on the vigor and aggressive spirit of our troops to make up in a measure for their inexperience, but at the same time the fact was not overlooked that lack of technical skill might considerably reduce the chance of complete success against well organized resistance of experienced defenders.

General Petain had already given it as his opinion that we should not be able to get farther than Montfaucon before winter.

### CHAPTER LIX

The Meuse-Argonne offensive opened the morning of September 26. To call it a battle may be a misnomer yet it was a battle, the greatest, the most prolonged in American history. Through 47 days we were engaged in a persistent struggle with the enemy to smash through his defenses.

The attack started on a front of 24 miles, which gradually extended until the enemy was being actively assailed from the Argonne Forest to the Moselle River, 90 miles.

If all more than 1,200,000 were employed and the attack was driven 22 miles to the north and 14 miles to the northeast before the armistice terminated hostilities, the numbers engaged, the diverse character of the fighting and the terrain, the numerous crises and the brilliant feats of individuals and units make a detailed description of the battle extremely complicated and necessarily confusing to the reader.

The outstanding fact that I desire to emphasize is that, once started, the battle was maintained continuously and relentlessly to the end. All difficulties were overridden in our tremendous sustained effort to terminate the war then and there in a victorious manner.

### Battle Opens Favorably

After three hours' violent artillery preparation the attack began at 5:30 a. m. At the same time, to divert the enemy's attention elsewhere, local raids and demonstrations were made on the Meuse-Moselle front. The French Fourth army (Gouard) to our left on the west of the Argonne forest, began its attack half an hour later.

The battle opened favorably. Our attack at that particular place and at that time evidently came as a surprise to the enemy, and our troops were enabled quickly to overrun his forward positions.

The vast network of untraced barbed wire, the deep ravines, dense woods and heavy fog made it difficult to co-ordinate the movements of the assaulting infantry, especially of some divisions in battle for the first time, yet the advance throughout was extremely vigorous.

### Third Corps Reaches Second Line

The Third Corps (Bullard), nearest the Meuse, carried the enemy's second position before dark. The Thirty-third Division (Bell), wheeling to the right as it advanced, occupied the west bank of the Meuse to protect the flank of the army. The Bois de Forces, with its difficult terrain and strong machine gun defenses was carried in splendid fashion.

The right of the Eightieth Division (Cronkhite) had by noon cleared the Bois Juhe in the face of heavy machine gun fire and established its line north of Dannevoix. On its left, after an all-day fight, the division forced its way through the strong positions on Hill 262 and reached the northern slopes of that hill.

The Fourth Division (Hines), on the left of the Eightieth, took Septsarges and firmly established itself in the woods to the north. It was abreast of Nantillois and its left was more than a mile beyond Montfaucon, but through some misinterpretation of the orders by the Third corps the opportunity to capture Montfaucon that day was lost. Three counter-attacks against the division during the afternoon were broken up.

### Fifth Corps Falls Short

In the center the Fifth Corps (Cameron), with the exception of the ninety-first Division (Johnston) on its left, fell short of its objective.

The 79th Division (Kuhn), on the right of the corps, took Malancourt, but in the open ground beyond encountered considerable opposition, and the advanced elements were not in position before Montfaucon before late afternoon. The attack of the division launched against this strong point early in the evening was met by the fire of artillery and machine guns from the southern slopes of the hill, which held up further progress.

The Thirty-seventh division (Farnsworth), in the center of the fifth corps, after overcoming heavy machine gun fire, pushed through the Bois de Montfaucon, and its attacks in the afternoon carried the line up

to and west of Montfaucon. The left of its line, facing stiff opposition, cleaned up the woods in its front and established itself just south of Ivory.

The Ninety-first Division (Johnston) overcame strong initial resistance and advanced rapidly to Epinonville, which it entered but did not hold. Crossing into the sector of the Thirty-first division, during the day it occupied Vervy.

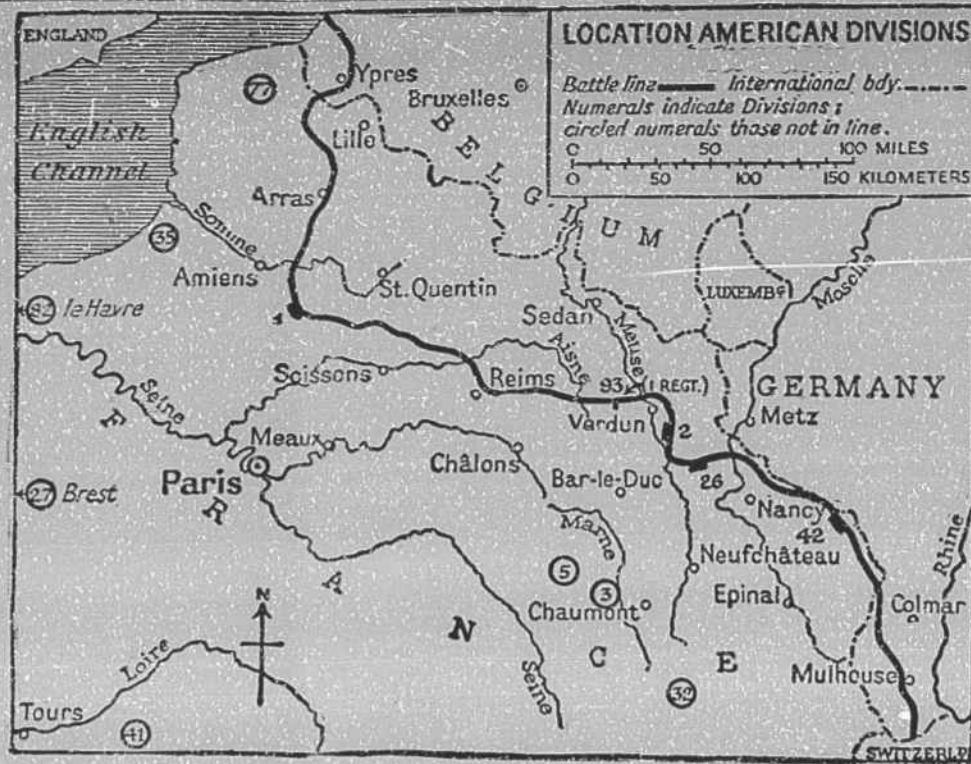
### First Corps Makes Progress

On the left of the army the First Corps (Liggett) made excellent progress. The Thirty-fifth division, under Traub, cleverly captured the strong position of Vanquois and took Cheppy against stubborn opposition. Elements of the division reached the corps objective east of Charpenry, but were soon withdrawn to a line west of Vervy. On the left the division captured that part of Varennes east of the Aire river, but was held up between Varennes and Cheppy. At this time a fresh regiment took the lead, giving a new impetus to the attack, and pushed the line forward to the high ground south of Charpenry.

In the Twenty-eighth division (Muir) the right brigade captured the western half of Varennes and continued about a mile farther. The left brigade, facing the eastern spurs of the Argonne, which constituted the enemy's chief defense of that forest, was unable to overcome the intense machine gun fire from that vicinity of Champ Mahaut. The Seventy-seventh division (Alexander) in the difficult terrain of the Argonne made some progress.

By the evening of September 27 the Fifth corps was abreast of the First and the Third on its flanks. The Seventy-ninth captured Montfaucon the morning of September 27 and on the next day Nantillois and the Bois de Beuve were passed despite determined resistance.

In the next instalment General Pershing continues his description of the great battle of the Meuse-Argonne.



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### NOTICE OF EXECUTION SALE

By virtue of certain executions directed to the undersigned Coroner of Watauga County from the Superior Court of said county in certain actions entitled "The Watauga Chevrolet Company, Inc., vs. F. C. Ward, L. M. Farthing, J. W. Ward, W. J. Mast and W. Harden Brown" and "The Unaka and City National Bank of Johnson City, Tennessee, vs. F. C. Ward, J. W. Ward, L. M. Farthing and W. J. Mast," I will on Tuesday, September 22, 1931, (said date being the second day of Watauga Superior Court) at 2 o'clock p. m., at the courthouse door of Watauga County, sell to the highest bidder for cash to satisfy said executions all the right, title and interest which the said F. C. Ward and J. W. Ward have in the following described real estate:

**BEGINNING** at the month of a branch in front of Ward's home, and runs north 87 degrees east passing the old road at 10 poles in all 82 poles to a stake at the forks of the branch, the old Adams' corner in the Greene line; then north 64 degrees east 5 1-4 poles to a small maple; then north 42 degrees east 29 poles to a beach; then north 37 degrees east with a drain at the foot of the hill 62 feet to a rock; then north 4 1-2 degrees east 21 poles to a maple; then north 86 1-2 degrees west with Bradley's and J. H. Shipley's line 206 poles to a stake, F. C. Ward corner; then south 7 degrees east 39 3-4 poles to a small hickory; then south 29 degrees west 15 1-2 poles to a stake; then south 34 degrees west crossing the creek to a stake at the Campbell gate at the old road; then south 59 degrees east with the old road 8 3-5 poles to a stake; then south 78 degrees east 37 poles to a rock at the old foot log; then south 82 degrees east 30 poles crossing the creek to a rock between road and creek; then south 60 degrees east 18 poles to the beginning, containing 118 1-8 acres more or less.

Subject to the life estate of J. W. Ward and wife, Betty Ward, and also subject to \$2,000.00 to be paid to the daughters of J. W. Ward and wife, Betty Ward, after the death of J. W. Ward and wife, Betty Ward. This August 21, 1931. J. B. HAGAMAN, Coroner. By H. A. Hagaman, Dep. Cor. John E. Brown, Atty. for Plaintiff 8-13-31

**JOHN E. BROWN**  
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