My EXPERIENCES in the WORLD WAR

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

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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 peak of the great center-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

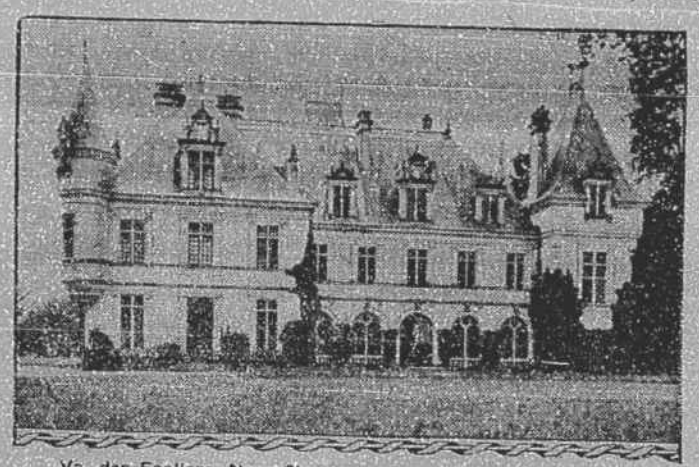
Nevertheless, the first appearance of American combat troops in Paris brought joyful acclaim from the people. On the march the battalion was accompanied by a great crowd, many women forcing their way into the ranks and swinging along arm in arm with the men. With wreaths about their necks and flowers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

With only a semblance of a 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 frierd and something of an orator, to speak in my place. However, I was 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!"



Va des Ecoliers, Near Chaumont, Domicile of the American Commander in France.

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 an 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 cabled 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 oversea supplies."

An entry in my diary notes: "Two of the Roosevelt boys, Theodore Jr. and Archie, reported. Unable to participate himself, their father's fine spirit is represented by his sons."

CHAPTER VIII

As the details of our mission abroad developed it soon became evident that in all that pertained to the maintenance and supply of our armies as 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, more 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.

Heavy Work for the Staff

During the first two months in France the work imposed upon the few staff officers who had accompanied me was very heavy. After urgent and repeated requests I was fortunate in having at my disposal later in the summer a small group of men which included some of the most brilliant and highly educated officers in our army.

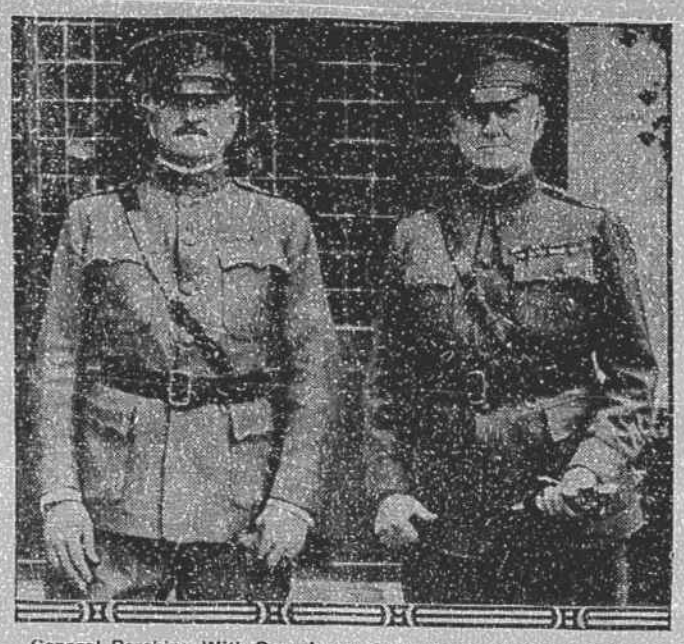
In addition to those already with me, the officers included in the following cable I regarded as especially fitted for the duties for which they were desired:

"Request Robert C. Davis, adjutant general, be sent these headquarters earliest date. Request Frank Moorman or J. O. Mauborgne be sent these headquarters earliest date for duty as code expert. Request Samuel T. Hubbard Jr., signal corps, now here, be called to active service and ordered to report to me. Request ten of following named officers be sent to report to me by second convoy for general staff duty: Frank R. McCoy, George Van Horn Moseley, Malin Craig, Alfred W. Bjornstadt, H. B. Fiske, Allen J. Grear, Paul B. Malone, Edgar T. Collins, Samuel R. Gleaves, Laurence Halstead, Nicholas W. Campanole, A. R. Moreno, Preston Brown, LeRoy R. Eltinge W. B. Burtt, Frank T. Hines, Edward L. King, J. P. McAdams, W. C. Sweeney, J. B. Barnes, Kerr T. Riggs, W. H. Winters, Wait C. Johnson, Stuart Heintzelman, Upton Birnie, Kirby Walker, Berkley Enochs. . . ."

Having this nucleus and selecting the best features of the French and British staff systems, a general staff organization was created, which efficiently met every demand made upon it throughout the war and which remains today as a model for present and future guidance.

The question of artillery procurement caused me much concern. The almost negligible amount on hand when we went to war consisted mostly of field guns of the three-inch type, then largely in the hands of troops in the Philippine Islands and elsewhere and unavailable for issue. Moreover, for calibres heavier than the three-inch type our ordnance department had adopted nothing which was really up to date.

The enormous proportion of both light and heavy guns used by both sides, the knowledge of our deficiency and the realization of the length of time that must lapse before we could manufacture and deliver them made it imperative that we seek other sources than our own to help equip our armies.



General Pershing With Gen. James G. Harbord, His Chief of Staff.

Following up an intimation it was learned definitely that, although not fully supplied themselves, the French could increase the output of their factories provided they could get steel from the United States. As it seemed probable that we should operate in proximity to their armies we adopted the French types for the usual calibres and sought their assistance in obtaining the guns needed, at least for the first two years. We secured an agreement that our troops as they came along would be provided with French guns and ammunition including not only the 75s and 155s but 37 mm. guns and 58 mm. trench mortars as well.

It was most fortunate that we were able to get these guns from the French, as up to the end of the war no guns of American manufacture of the types used, except twenty-four eight-inch mortars and six 14-inch naval guns were fired in battle.

Trench guns of the three-inch and six-inch mortar types, with ammunition, were purchased from the British, as they were considered superior to those used by the French.

Progress of Red Cross

The Red Cross reported excellent progress at this time, especially in its efforts to assist the French as agreed upon with General Petain, its organization by Major Grayson M. P. Murphy for war work with our own armies was now about completed. The establishment of canteens and huts at the ports and other important points had already begun and the numbers increased as fast as needed.

These centers of service later maintained dispensaries and provided beds and bathing facilities for men traveling under orders or on leave. When the necessity arose the Red Cross actively co-operated with the medical corps in the field, contributing large quantities of supplies and often additional nurses. The work of the society, directed from a central office in Paris, eventually embraced practically every endeavor touching the health of the armies.

CHAPTER IX

I left Paris July 26, 1917, for a visit with Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, the British commander in chief whose headquarters were in an old chateau half hidden away in a magnificent grove at Beldiques. I was accompanied by Colonels Harbord and Alvord and Captain Patton of my staff.

At dinner the subject of conversation naturally turned on the military situation of the Allied armies, our own in particular. They were keen to know about our army, its organization and size, and the prospects of our putting troops in the field. As our active participation depended on many factors, such as training, equipment and shipping, my replies, of course, were indefinite and no doubt disappointing.

In turn we asked many questions, and it was especially interesting to hear the importance of artillery emphasized by its chief, Major General Birch, who spoke of the difficulties they had experienced in supplying themselves with guns that matched the enemy's.

Referring to their lack of artillery in the beginning, General Birch said there was reason to beliefe that they had finally attained a superiority over the Germans.

Real Teamwork Lacking

Sir Douglas told me some of the details of Nivelle's unsuccessful attack in the spring, how it was known far and wide beforehand, and spoke particularly of the consequent serious disaffection among the French troops. Although he had placed himself under Nivelle's command for these operations, he had, he said, little confidence in the outcome from the start. He also commented on the failure of the French to co-operate fully on various occasions. His remarks entirely confirmed the belief that I had long since held that real teamwork between the two armies was almost totally absent.

Scarcely anything more strikingly impressed upon me our unpreparedness than what I day during a few hours spent with General Trenchard at the British flying field, where we witnessed flyers doing every imaginable stunt, and saw planes of all classes, bombing, pursuit and observation, motors of different types and the thoroughly equipped repair shops.

The outstanding thing, however, which it was gratifying to note later on in our own aviation personnel, was the incomparable spirit and alertness of the young officers and the enlisted personnel. Every man seemed to be disappointed when a flight of planes departed for the front without him.

Conferences Valuable

This visit to British headquarters was most instructive, as every opportunity was given us to study intimately the details of their wartime organization. After similar studies of the French system we selected from each those features best suited to perfect a well-balanced staff for our own army.

The cordial relations and good understanding established between Sir Douglas Haig and myself and between the corresponding members of our staffs and with a number of the leading British officers with whom we were later to have official dealings proved very advantageous. In London, long after the Armistice Sir Douglas in an after dinner speech referred to this visit, which happened during a period of depression, and said that our timely appearance at his headquarters had aroused in them a strong feeling of hopefulness for the future.

Meets Other Leaders

My diary at this time notes the following:

Paris, Thursday, July 26, '27: Had breakfast yesterday at the Crillon with Lloyd George. He is alert and energetic and has a clear conception of Allied problems. Took lunch with Balfour who thinks we have reason to feel easier regarding submarines. Representatives of the various Allies met for conference on general situation. In the evening, M. Ribot, the prime minister gave a state dinner of officials attending conference.

Today attended luncheon to Allied representatives given my President and Mme. Poincare at the Elysee palace.

In conference this afternoon with Petain, Cadorna, Robertson and Foch at latter's office. Discussed military plans, talked about tonnage possibilities and shortage of personnel. All pessimistic and reserved.

James Stillman, just returned from a tour of France, confirms reports of serious depression.

Situation Not Hopeful

The meeting of the Allied military leaders July 26, which was my first, brought out little that was hopeful. The political relations of the Allies were touched upon in a general way, but only so far as they might affect the military situation. The most significant recent event, of course, had been the crisis in Russia.

With reference to American assistance, I gave in detail the situation as to our man power, immediate and prospective, especially in the light of the latest plans of the department, and laid particular emphasis on the necessity of additional shipping. A cablegram had just been received in response to mine of July 6 in which I had requested that at least a million men reach France by the following spring.

This message, indicating that the War Department foresaw a small chance of securing the necessary tonnage, was read to the conference in part as follows:

"By using all shipping which is now in sight for the purpose and which will be available after month of November, the plan proposes to transport to France by June 15, 1918 twenty-one divisions, comprising almost 420,000 men, together with auxiliary troops and replacement troops, line of communication troops, and others, amounting to 214,975 men, making a total of 634,975 men."

More Tonnage Needed

Although short of my recommendations, even this schedule could be carried out only by a very large increase of tonnage. The other members of the conference were of the opinion that if new adjustments could be made there might be shipping for nine or ten of our divisions before spring. So for the moment, there did not seem to be the slightest chance of transporting a million men to France by the following June.

After canvassing the whole situation, the conference expressed the unanimous opinion that a defensive role should be adopted on all secondary fronts. The British and French representatives hoped that the surplus troops resulting from this course might be available to strengthen their armies in France and General Cadorna, of course, thought the Italian armies should have their full share.

CHAPTER X

About this time (July, 1917) disturbing reports were submitted to me confidentially by one of our naval officers sent by Admiral Sims from London. Calculations based upon tonnage losses for May, June and July seemed to confirm the conclusions of a month previous that there would soon be insufficient allied shipping left to bring over an American army of required strength, and that the Allies would find it difficult to keep up their food supply from overseas. The data presented by the naval officer proved that if this rate of destruction could not be reduced the war would be lost before we could fire a shot.

This report was certainly most pessimistic, but it did not dispel my confidence in the success of the plan that had been tested and was about to be inaugurated by sending ships over in convoys under the protection of naval vessels. Additional destroyers requested by Admiral Sims had by this time largely increased such craft in European waters and as a result the activities of submarines had been somewhat diminished for July as compared with April.

Yet for the time being ship construction in British yards continued below losses and our shipping board at home had scarcely stopped wrangling over materials and types. All these facts caused everybody to realize the extreme urgency of speed, and that in turn gave some hope that the prospects might soon become brighter.

Spies Get Sailing Dates

The success of submarine warfare had been largely dependent upon advance knowledge concerning movements of vessels. As there was no doubt that the sailing dates of much of our shipping reached Germany through spies, one way to reduce the danger would be to close such sources of information.

In the beginning the practice by our War Department of transmitting secret information was extremely loose. The data regarding sailings was, of course, sent to my headquarters, but at the same time, or often before, it was also given to both the French and British military attaches and missions in Washington. They immediately transmitted the information by cable to their respective governments, with the result that it usually became almost common knowledge.

But there were other sources of information possessed by the enemy. One message intercepted by the French, sent from some wireless station in Spain to the German general staff, announced the arrival of several American vessels at Nantes and of 10,000 American soldiers at St. Nazaire, and also gave the routes taken by our transports.

Another, evidently intended for submarines, reported the departure of a convoy of transports from New York. These and similar facts were cabled at once to Admiral Sims and to Washington.

Leadership Big Problem

Probably the most important factor in building up an aggressive a is the selection of leaders. Without efficient leadership the finest of soldiers may suffer defeat by inferior forces skillfully handled.

The following was my recommendation to Secretary of War Baker:

"My observation of British and French armies and most exacting arduous service conditions at the front fully convince me that only officers in full mental and physical vigor should be sent here. Contrary course means certain inefficiency in our service and possible later humiliation of officers concerned. General officers must undergo extreme effort in personal supervision of operations in trenches. Very few British or French division commanders over forty-five or brigadiers over forty.

"We have too much at stake to risk inefficiency through mental or physical defects. Strongly recommend conditions be fully considered in making high appointments and suggest that no officer of whatever rank be sent here for active service who is not strong and robust in every particular. Officers selected for appointment general officer of line should be those with experience in actively commanding troops. Officers not fulfilling above conditions can be usefully employed at home training troops."

These recommendations were not altogether followed at home. In fact very little effort seems to have been made at selection, so that some officers without ambition or initiative, whose inefficiency should have been well known, and others whose age and physical condition were such as to disqualify them for strenuous service, were given important assignments.

Most of them were known to me and not a few who, under the rule of seniority, were commanders of regiments and departments, had lacked the energy even to train their commands or themselves in battle exercises, where favorable opportunity had been afforded.

The policy of the War Department from beginning to end seemed to be to appoint officers to the higher grade, according to seniority, with the intention of weeding out the inefficient later on. This appears to have been the department's idea of selection and the result was practically no selection at all. After the appointment of such officers it was a slow process to eliminate them.

In the Training Area

The First Division was now well settled in its training area in the region of Gondrecourt, south of Bar-le-Duc. The troops of the division had already established friendly relations with the French peasantry and had quickly adapted themselves to their new mode of life.

As the natural consequence of the financial condition of the frugal French provincial, he was wont to profit by the presence of the British and ourselves, and the open-handed payday habits of the Americans served to give some encouragement to this inclination. As a result some coolness grew up later between our men and their early friends.

In all history I do not believe there has ever been an army on foreign soil so considerate and observant of the rights and interests of the people. The peasant class made a strong appeal to every man in the army. Their simplicity, their love of the soil and the long hours of work in the fields by the old men and women and young boys and girls remained the constant admiration of our soldiers.

I am inclined to think, however, that the excellent behavior of the men in the first contingent, their rather unmilitary appearance in ill-fitting uniforms and their apparent lack fo formal discipline created the impression in the minds of French officials that they were too kind-hearted to become aggressive fighting troops.

At the conclusion of my inspection of various places Chaumont was selected as the best site for our general headquarters. It was on our line of communications to the front and centrally placed as to probable sectors of our operations. The fine stone regimental barracks became our headquarters and we were able to obtain ample billeting accommodations in houses for all except the enlisted men, who were provided with temporary barracks.

General Pershing Inspecting Poilus.

In the next instalment the American chief tells more about the A. E. F. training and billeting areas.

BLIGHT

By RUTH BOWLIN

I see the trees on every hill
All brown and dead with subtle blight;
I never know disease is there
Until it leaves a barren sight.

There stands the trunk with doty limbs—
A tree that once was tall and straight,
But now it sways, a tott'ring wreck,
And cure for it is all too late.

* * *

And all around I see the wrecks
Of human life. The blight of sin
Has swept across the human heart,
Has burned it out and entered in.

The barren hearts and blighted lives
Cry out for help; sin takes its toll:
"Is there no balm in Gilead?"
And "no physician" for the soul?

And then I seem to see the hands
Of Him who walked by Galilee
Stretched forth to heal, and hear Him say,
"The Great Physician, I am He."

This notice was posted on a pleasure boat belonging to a certain steamship company:

"The chairs in the cabins are for ladies. Gentlemen are requested not to make use of them till the ladies are seated."

Read the Ads—They Are Messengers of Thrift!